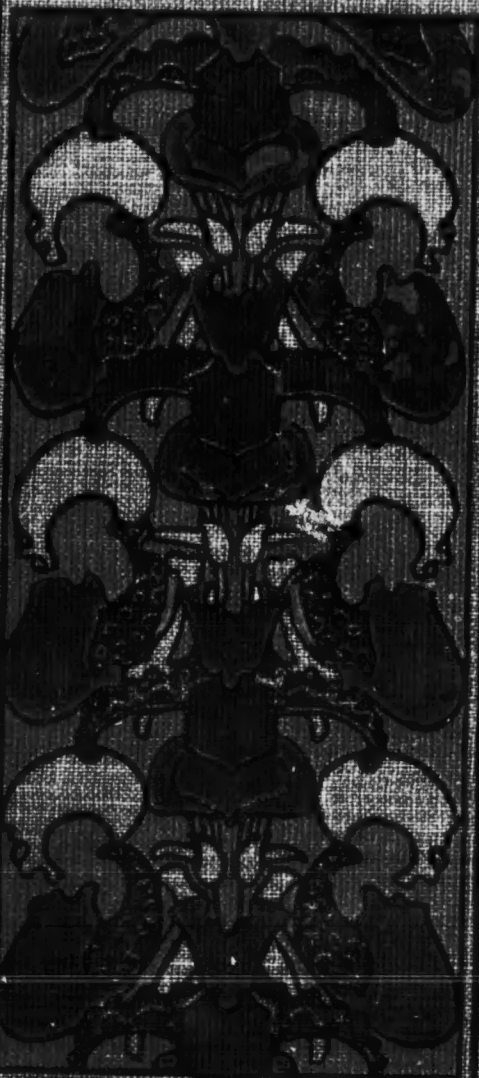


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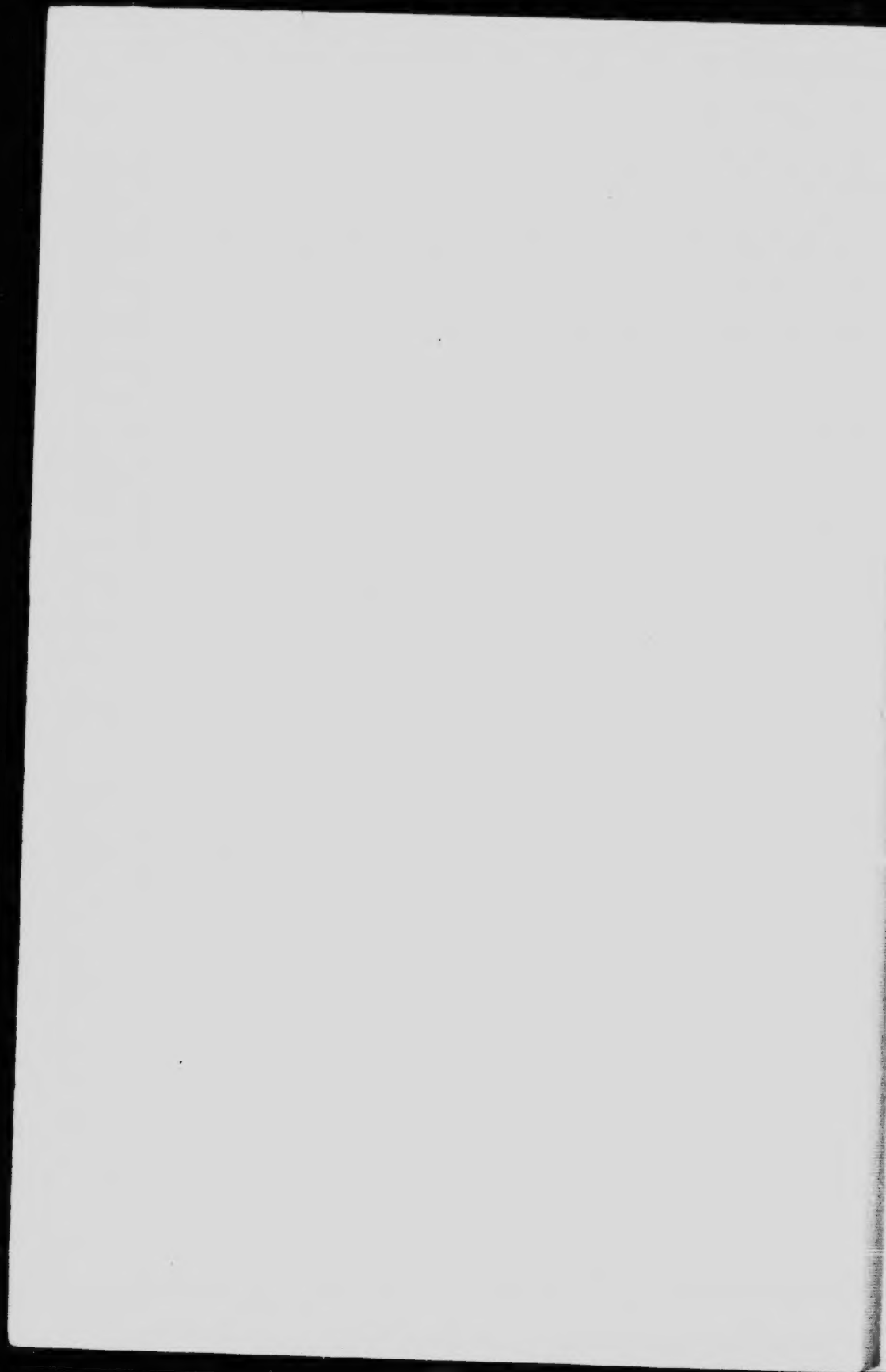


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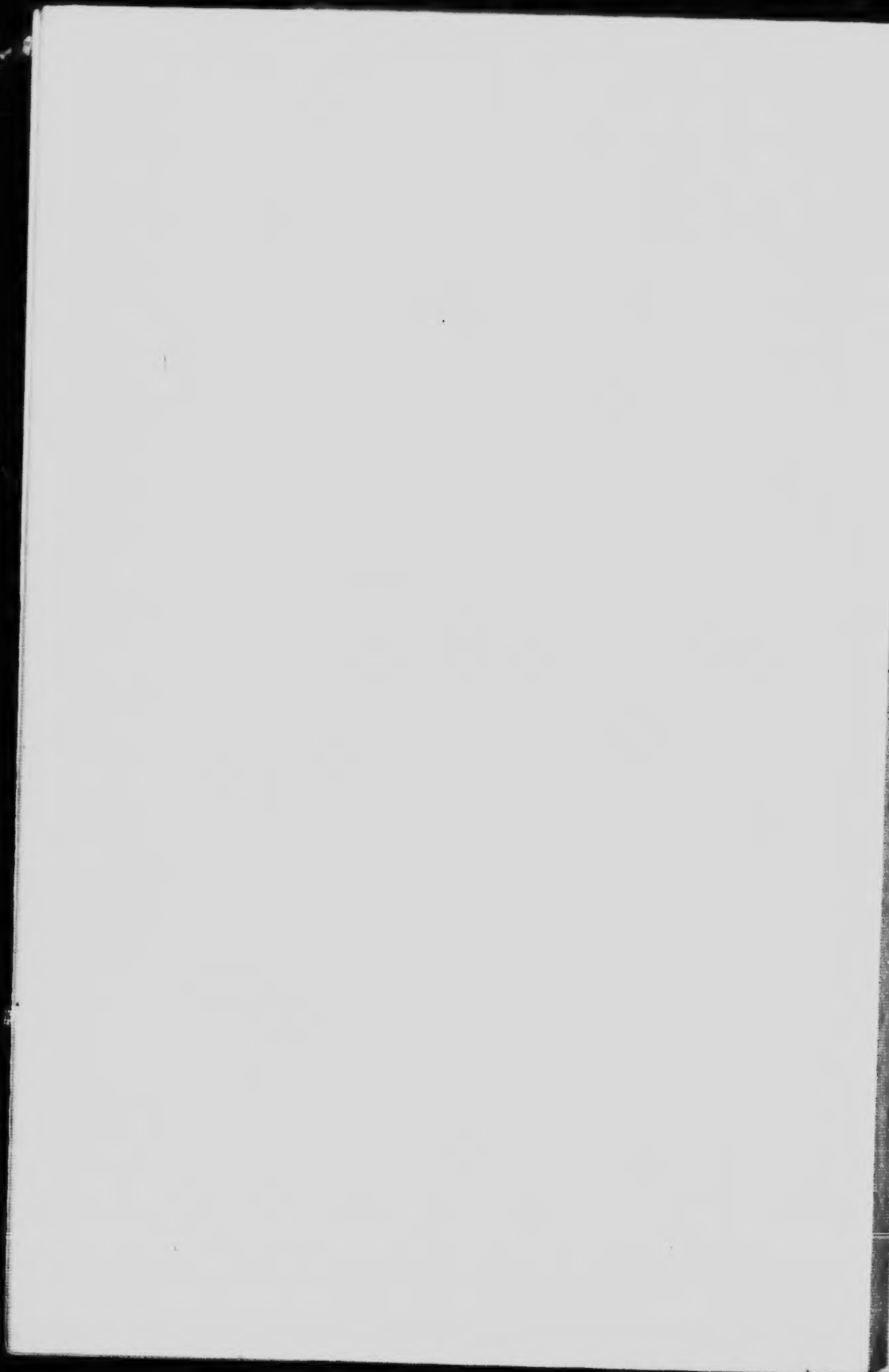
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ELISABETH KOETT



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BY

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I

IT was upon the occasion of the first performance of the *Valkyrie* in Graz. After the first act the crowded boxes had poured their occupants into the passages where comparisons with the Vienna opera were instituted. The galleries, however, and a part of the pit, were still held silent and moveless by the magic of the perished music. In all these fevered bodies soared and stirred the song of Spring, the rapture of the moonlit night and of the approach of fate.

Observed from the stage through a hole in the curtain, this deeply moved, watchful, trembling crowd in the auditorium seemed but one being—a being in its collective entirety of form like a huge bird of prey, wings and beak tensely held in check for an attack. The possibility of a sudden descent, a fierce grasping of its prey!—the inferior artist was conscious of this image. A very different one presented itself to the few powerful temperaments among the performers. They saw in these bright but speckled wings spread out over the galleries, in the white body of the center, in the dark, drawn

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rows of the *parterre*, rather the picture of a hawk transfixed by the peasant to his barn-door. For they had it in their power to rob of its own will this monster of four thousand eyes, to shake it, to affright it, to transfix it by the power of a passion cleaving bone and marrow. And this being which resembles a bird of prey, but which can destroy or else exalt one to the very regions of the sun, now trembled, moveless, through a million nerves. . . .

High up, in the topmost gallery, this quiver was most intense and most sacred. For there stood the consecrated poor of our time. There stood, a bit of dry bread in their pockets, those who had sacrificed the rest of their supper in order to feel, in all its might and terror, the revelation of the secret of all human things.

They stood there or sat on the last benches, those who had scarce money enough to buy a few numbers in some series of cheap reprints: those blessed ones whose poverty keeps them afar from the books of the day and who are therefore drawn into kinship with all Olympus. They whose daily commerce was with Sophocles, Homer, Shakespeare, Molière, and Goethe, experienced a joy as pure and piercing as is ever felt by mortal man.

With an innocent throbbing of the heart they stand in the gallery—they to whom the great Russians of the eighties were the last word in literature and who, in the Winter of 1897, were on the point of discovering Wagner! To-morrow, or next Spring,

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perhaps, they will discover Schopenhauer, Nietzsche or Stirner—these poor students, clerks, music-scholars, apprentices and workingmen, to whom almost alone in our time the Kingdom of Heaven opens an earthly portal. They are to be called blessed.

Up there, among them, stood Wigram, the sturdy, strong-skulled, poor librarian with his roughly chiselled face, his agate-like eyes, and the most schooled of visionary hearts. It was his ambition to be a philosopher, but he spoke of it to no one.

There, too, stood the student and private tutor Theodore Rasmus, holy and unholy at once! He was lean, as became his calling. He shared the admirable pagan piety of our time, and hence loved with a deep and cherishing love the frogs and reeds of riversides, mountain height, and cloud, great music and great verse. The man's whole nature vibrated like a cradle-song, even his deliberate hymning voice. He was just speaking to Wigram, a deep devoutness in his modulated tones. He held this Richard Wagner to be among the true children of God, even though, and in spite of . . . much! He had dark-brown hair and his long locks rose with every expressive movement of his head. His nose was curved, long, pointed, ardently red.

Wigram was silent and continued to regard a serious young woman who stood near him, and who seemed to have no acquaintance here but stage and curtain. She was tall and of heroic build, and he had never seen her in Graz, on the promenade, or in the

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park, where women, worthy of being seen, are to be seen. To be sure, she seemed poor. Her garb was almost like that of a Russian student: whether from poverty or a craving after pure form, Heaven only knew. Her dress was dark-blue and plain: her attitude straight, moveless, and tense.

During the darkness of the first act Wigram had thought her hair black. Her great earnestness had even then evoked two or three glances from him. Now, under the glow of the chandeliers, she seemed almost fair.

"Look here, Rasmus," Wigram turned to his friend, "is that tall girl dark or light?"

Rasmus was in his element. The science of woman was his. He let the Wagner question glide, eel-like, from his grasp, and turned a consciously practiced eye upon the tall girl's profile.

"Aha, yes, yes," he said. "She's one with hair like threads of old, golden bronze. When the tresses are all together, they are like darkened bronze: the delicate locks on forehead, temple, or nape are luminous gold. She ought to have the so-called Nubian skin. Heavens, what a superb creature! Look at her throat, the way she holds her head!"

"The Nubian style is darker," Wigram said critically.

"Peach-tinted," Rasmus corrected himself. "It's a color like the brunette fruit-stains which peaches leave on white table-linen." His judgment was delivered with the gestures of a connoisseur.

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The pale girl turned farther away; the lights softened; the second act began.

Rasmus was a good critic. As long as Wotan and Fricka contended on the stage he improved his esthetic joy by the devout consumption of an admirable cervelat sausage. Soft and savory sounded the gentle detonation of the severed skin, the intimate mastication and swallowing to the beat of Wagner's music: the odor of the sausage soared triumphantly above it. Gently and tenderly Rasmus broke his accompanying bun, and opened all the pores of soul and body to Wagner, and to the delicious sausage. No one up there was disturbed by him. He was suggestive to them all of true life. Not till that central scene in which Brünhilde announces to Siegmund the coming of death, did he hasten to swallow his last morsels before the beginning of the thunders of fate. Now, comfortable and strengthened, he was reverently all ear to terror and death.

The girl, whose pallor glimmered through the dark, still stood upright beside him like a thirsty blade of grass in the field. But at the great presage of death a mysterious shudder passed from her to Rasmus, from him to Wigram. The whole gallery felt it.

It was silent in the theater. No one knew, at the end of the act, the reason of its greatness. The audience applauded itself back to life. But far off, under the stucco ceiling, stood Wigram, and when the act was over he spoke these words:

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"Death is the most precious gift of life. To love death, to yearn for death—that will be, some day, the loftiest of religions."

In spite of the almost tropical storm of applause that roared through the house, the strange girl showed a delicately alert ear. She had taken in every word of the earnest, square-built man, and looked at him with great eyes.

Rasmus interpreted deprecatingly between them.

"My friend here is a philosopher."

"It is most beautiful, what you said of death." She nodded assentingly.

"Death is the mightiest, the ninth and last symphony of God," Wigram explained. "We must learn to love and understand it, and we shall be unassailably blessed."

At the close of the evening he and the girl, drifting inevitably together, left the theater. Rasmus had helped her on with her fur-collar; Wigram drew on his great-coat. Then they stepped out together into the great pure silence of the night, and made their way through the heavy, thawing snow that lay on the streets.

"If you go with me," said the tall girl, "you must keep on speaking as earnestly as you began. But I live far from here."

"Very far?"

She named a distant suburb.

"And you tramped all that distance through the slush to the theater?"

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"I would have gone much farther," she answered with her modulated, warmly sensuous voice.

The suburb she had named was one of those quiet places in which, in other days, it had been possible even for the workingman to acquire a bit of ground and set on it his own homestead. "There," as Wigram remarked, "the little people still live in their little houses."

"Not entirely," the girl replied. "At the edge of the village a butcher has built our first flat-house. My parents are caretakers there, and in it live people of the new day: little people in big houses—people in whose hearts burrows the worm of modernity."

"You must tell me about all that," Wigram begged her.

They went through the wet snow, and the whole night and the whole street were one great dripping and purling. It was the secret ministry of the messengers of Spring, and musically the Winter died under every eave.

Here stood little independent houses with a bit of porch in front of each, accessible from either side. For a moment the girl stood still and pointed toward a house.

"The woman who lives there and her daughters shell corn, and their friends come in and help them and sing the while. In our big house few help their neighbors cheerfully, and all contend with one another. Yonder in that little garden-house sits an old locksmith during the still Autumn evenings when

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his little harvest of berries and fruits is garnered, and smokes and looks up at the clouds. In our house the men read the newspaper and, instead of clouds and dreams, the whole world's unrest floats through their souls. Here drowns a passing world. Up where we live a new one is arising, and of how that new world will upheave our souls I can tell you more than a little. To conquer—that is our watch-word."

"And you would conquer this new world from the stage?"

The girl was silent, perplexed and hurt.

"Do I bear the stamp of it so plainly?" she asked and stood still.

"You haven't a single trait in common with the easy-going folk of the stage," said Wigram. "But I think you may have the make-up of a great and serious actress."

"I want to be a tragic actress," she assented.

"And now I'll have the courage to ask you—much. I did want you to go with me, so that I might for once hear an earnest, thoughtful man speak of my plans. I've known you for long; I've often stood behind you to listen to your comments on a play or an opera. You never looked at me, and I often wanted to speak to you. Tell me now: can a woman like myself succeed on the stage?"

"In the art or in the life of the stage?"

"In the art," she said without hesitation.

"If she's big enough to condemn the success of the

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day and of the market-place—she can succeed, to the point of eminence, of genius.”

“Genius!” she cried raptly.

“Yes,” said Wigram. “Outside of the stage it has always seemed to me that woman can attain eminence only in the sphere of moral endeavor. Here is the sole exception. To please, to enrapture, to sway—isn’t that woman’s most primitively instinctive tendency? And so, in this one art, she can develop her true, her native being. Vanity, an ugly vice in man, is here and in her a high virtue. And hence woman is more truly meant for the stage than man. Into that art she can throw herself: in it a man may lose his individuality. Not she, who can express through it all the chameleon nature of her soul. Yes, truly, in this art she may reach genius!”

“Ah, you give me strength and courage,” she said, breathing deeply, and stretching out her arms into the refreshing night air. “Come a little farther; I’m near home. But tell me, how can one reach those heights, how achieve great parts?”

“Are you employed on the stage now?”

“Oh yes, as a super, or in small parts of ten words each. And I can’t get on. Because these little parts—servants, confidantes, seamstresses—are never treated with serious intent by the playwright, but require lightness, archness! Then, too, our director is really an opera singer, and you know how he conquers all souls with his art. And how much tragedy

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is tolerated outside of the opera to-day? Serious drama, even first-rate comedy, scarcely ever outlasts a few days here." Her voice rang out tumultuously.

"Heavens!—to be able to sing Brünhilde or those mighty women of Mozart, which no singer has yet comprehended fully—Elvira, or the Queen of the Night, to sing these greatly, sorrowfully, passionately!"

"Tragic singing and coloratura? A big order!"

"Ah yes," she answered, suddenly depressed, "everywhere one meets barriers."

"Would you," Wigram asked, "some day give a friend of mine and myself a specimen of what you can do? If you are the woman I take you for, a very small lift will go far to help. If, then, you get a chance to be heard, it will be your business to give us something worth hearing."

"Oh, I should love to do that, and I could!"

"What is your name?"

"Elisabeth Koett."

"And when can I see you again?"

"To-morrow, after rehearsal, on the *Franzensplatz*."

"Good. I'll ask a friend of mine to exert himself for you. . . . Elisabeth Koett . . . I wonder if that name will carry far some day?"

The girl shuddered gently. Her one chance was coming. It would be all or nothing. Here her whole being was at stake. She had no money for her

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wardrobe, and this consideration she knew to be, in the majority of cases, the price of innocence. To barter that priceless jewel for gaudy rags, for feathers, for silk stockings—as mighty an array of these as possible—that was usually the first step toward greatness! She knew it and clenched her teeth. “A sacrifice like any other,” she thought; “I must . . . must be great!”

But she trembled instinctively, like an animal in danger, when she thought of such a beginning for her career.

“And now,” said Wigram, “sleep well. Though, if you tumble your bedclothes all night, it may be better. The way to greatness lies past sleepless nights.”

He went straight through the noisy slush: he didn’t seem to observe it. One thought soared high in him. To observe a mighty spiritual development from its very beginning. What knowledge of humanity might arise from such a subject of contemplation! If, indeed, this woman were a genius, that rarest thing in the sex! One might then spend all one’s life in observing her and her soul, and the price to pay for the privilege would be no excessive one.

“If only,” he thought, “she truly is what she desires to be! But it is almost impossible. I’m once again foolish enough to believe a dream. Let us wait and prove all things. If disappointment is in store for me—that, too, will be marvelously instructive. . . .”

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The tall, earnest Elisabeth Koett looked after him as, unregarding, hands folded on back, he stormed on through the spattering slush and disappeared clumsily into the night. She thought—halfway—of a hippopotamus—halfway of . . . Beethoven.

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II

WIGRAM had made the acquaintance of the old Baron Gundenau in an antiquary's shop. He was buying a work on numismatics for the library which he managed. The old gentleman requested a moment's gleam at the book, opened it at a copper-plate, and compared with the picture two old, thick silver coins which he drew from his pocket.

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Wigram, "what beautiful Dareikons!"

"You recognize them?" The old gentleman was charmed. "Darius the Second and the Third. What do you think of them?"

Wigram picked up the coins carefully.

"You'll be glad to hear, perhaps, that they're faultlessly beautiful examples of their kind. They're eloquent, too, in a most suggestive way. The elder Darius, you can see, had barbarians cut his matrix. Look at that long-nosed, bumpy head, like a badly-baked bun. And here, the younger employed Ionian Greeks. What lovely curves and lines! What a divine head! The coin is exquisite."

The old gentleman beamed.

"Man alive!" he cried, "I specialize in the tyrants of Asia Minor—Ionians, Medes, Lycians, Persians, Phœnicians, and Jews. But my Ionic Greeks, my

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demi-gods—they are the best. Would you like to look at them? Will you come with me? I happen to have the time.”

Thus had Wigram come to know old Ferdinand von Gundenau, who cared for nothing on earth so much as for Ionic coins and for the theater. At his house, too, he had met the student Rasmus, who eked out his small income by helping the Baron with his numismatic essays. All three were thoroughly congenial.

Gundenau sat in the pit of the theater, while the two poor young men stood in the gallery. Beyond this none of them had a sense of social difference.

On the morning of the day following his meeting with Elisabeth Koett, Wigram rushed to Rasmus.

“Look here, can the Baron be seen?”

“He’s just arranging some new acquisitions, and can’t be disturbed.”

“When can I get hold of him?”

“Shortly before noon. Why?”

“You remember the tall girl in the gallery last night?”

“Yes, surely.”

“She’s on the stage, still largely in the dark about herself, but a plugged volcano in reality. Give her air, and the world will echo!”

“She makes that impression. A great artist? And you saw her home? How did she act?”

“Silent, but full of passion.”

“For you?”

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"For her ideas."

"Ah, she is beautiful, too. What are your intentions?"

"Merely to help her on. You must coöperate."

"Gladly! Gundenau's interest must be engaged. It's a miracle that has come to us. It will be magnificent. And how splendid she is. Remember the way she held her head, as if a crown were pressing that bronze hair! What's her name?"

"Elisabeth Koett."

"Elisabeth—the name of the great queens. Ah, Wigram, we must apply this torch to the world."

"What are you so noisy about?" the Baron asked from the next room.

"We have discovered a genius!" cried this enthusiast of all that is unusual.

Gundenau joined them and smiled at Wigram.

"That coin of Cyrus is a work of genius, I know."

"That!" Rasmus snorted. "We've discovered a great tragic actress," he declared, full of faith.

Gundenau was immediately attentive. He took his turkish fez from his thin, gray hairs, and turned it about in his hands. Then he put it on again, locked the door of his cabinet of coins, and stood, all portly attention, before his two friends.

"Let me hear about her."

"Heavens!" thought Wigram, "but Rasmus will lay it on."

Rasmus was a liar. He was willing to lie Heaven down upon earth. He did not lie from vanity or the

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craving to assume romantic airs; he did not lie from the desire to be overheard and wondered at, nor to deceive, nor to give pain. It was the creative artist's yearning that made him lie, the poet's woe! He lied the crooked straight, smoothing out what the Eternal had bungled. Once, having saved and stinted himself for long, he had made a journey to Venice. And, most bitter fate, it rained, rained. . . . But he came back and told of the luminousness of the azure flame of heaven in the greenish lagoon, of the opalescence of the pink, orange, and blue houses of the South on the banks of the Riva and in Chioggia. He told of the laughter of the soul-compelling waves at Murano, of that masterpiece of the Celestial Artist, which constantly tempts the great craftsmen in cut and colored glass—that mirror of the sea which is lovelier than any Venetian mirror with its golden blue and rosy green mosaic effects whenever a breeze trembles across its surface. And all men, hearing him, conceived a yearning to follow in his footsteps, saying: "Fortunate man! All things are revealed to you at their loveliest."

And thus he now related the fable and the fairy-tale of Elisabeth Koett.

"She is an enchanted queen, and from the garb of Cinderella rises the sinewy, slender, proudly passionate body of Gudrun. She washes furniture-covers and table-linen, and sings old sagas the while, so that men, hearing her, must dream of mighty things. Her voice is like the wind in the cliffs of the sea—now

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murmuring like a harp, now resonant as thunder. She has all gifts: passion, sweetness, power, and ingratiatingness, beauty, heroism, hysteria, perversity—everything, everything!”

“Well, well,” said Gundenau, who knew his man somewhat, “let us hope that one-tenth of all that is true. We’ll put her through her paces—but thoroughly! You may trust me for that.”

“When may she come?”

“Would to-day do? At noon?” asked Wigram.

“Perfectly,” said Gundenau. “and watch out, watch out! Trying out actresses, that’s my specialty.”

Wigram went, Rasmus hurried along with him; the old Baron, excited and distraught, went back to his coins. . . .

On the next morning Elisabeth started out into the day of her awakening. She had told her parents nothing, for these were ever awaiting the rich gentleman who should make Elisabeth his mistress and pour money into *their* lap. Had they known of Wigram they would have given way to a rancorous outburst against the poor philosopher. Had they, on the other hand, known about Gundenau, they would have tried to bedizen her like a plaster saint. But this day with its deep searchings was new to her, and so she held her peace.

The thaw had continued, and the air was redolent with the odors of earth and of melting snow. High in the heavens the clouds jostled each other north-

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ward, and were rent in their haste: the hearts of men were clamorous with joy over the blue of the heaven. The whole landscape was full of wandering shadows, and, like celestial sailing-ships, islands of light floated silently over the plain, over the curving hills, and the farther uplands. At one moment the vales of the Mur were picked out by a sunny glow, next a hill church, then the whole *Schlossberg*.

Elisabeth belonged to those myriads whose feeling for nature does not extend beyond an appreciation of the elements that make up a free Sunday—dustless greenery, quietude, a meal in the open, the faint, far crowing of a cock. Without her knowledge, however, her vibrating nerves were under the sway of wind and weather. To-day, in the thaw, she was restless and, in a measure, intoxicated; now full of confidence, now full of troubling thoughts. Whenever the sunshine filled the street with glitter and warmed her shoulders, she went slowly; when clouds passed over the sun and a frosty wind arose, she hastened, driven by the skies themselves.

The rehearsal had not yet begun. On the *Franzensplatz*, under the columns of the driveway, stood the great ones of the stage and spoke of trifles; the small fry huddled together behind the great gate in the frosty alley. Only a few ventured to emerge into the changeful, meeting sunshine. None were truly glad of the day's many graces.

Elisabeth stood there silent and apart from the others. "Am I going to stand here to-morrow, and

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the next day, and a month from now?" The fateful uncertainty of her life agitated her deeply, and she felt her impassioned heart-beats throb in her very throat. She almost gasped for air, and every beat of her pulses seemed to veil her eyes as with a cloud.

At last came the manager of to-day's performance—a clever, malicious fellow, full of new notions and a passion for reform. He was a native of Stockholm, named Sven Eppelin; he preferred Ibsen, and confused all the minor actors with the excessive subtlety of his requirements. To-day they were to rehearse *An Enemy of the People*, but the actors were quite indifferent to the play. They stared at the get-up of the manager.

"You may congratulate yourselves, my children," said an old stager, "he's got on his Prince Albert and his black tie. That means he's invited to dine out."

They were all as delighted as schoolboys. The rehearsal would soon be over. Half of them had drifted hither through a vague love of art, half to gain a sorry but almost effortless livelihood. All united in detesting the necessary periods of instruction. Among these people Elisabeth was necessarily a stranger. Concerning her ambitions, she was silent. She did what was required of her, and lay in wait for a chance. And such opportunity, sure to arise in the general life of man, comes even oftener amid the changeful folk of the stage.

This time Elisabeth, too, longed for the end of

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the rehearsal. Usually she silently followed the work of that actress among the principals whose parts were most congenial to her. In her soul she would accompany every glance, every gesture, every sigh, and be tempted to cry out in triumph over her inner certainty of deeper power and more impassioned insight. Every such moment she would treasure as an unforgettable one. At home she went over the parts by herself, and cried out aloud in the glorious consciousness of her superiority. In such hours she gave her temperament free reign, for she wanted to test its tone and quality. In public she was reserved and of a tense serenity.

On the stage itself she restrained herself with difficulty. When the icy breath of the great, empty place floated around her, she wanted to play, play till she was heated. And this passion went through her very marrow whenever she perceived the mingled odor of dust, lime, and canvas—that odor which has prepared so many hearts for the great disappointment.

The gray reverse of the curtain, the bare perspectiveless stage represented to her the darkness and repression of a pre-natal state. "When will the curtain rise for me and I stand in that pool of light? When, ah, when?"

To-day she was almost feverish, and when the rehearsal was over, she went slowly and with a nervous terror in her heart from the theater. In the sun stood Wigram and Rasmus, awaiting her. Rasmus

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laughed with the triumph of life, Wigram was serious, almost solemn. Rasmus cried out:

"This day will make you great!"

"If you haven't some special *diable au corps*, you will remain small for all external success. Don't trust his gilded dreams."

Elisabeth gave Wigram her hand.

"I will trust you, for you are strict."

So these three went to Gundenau's house, and Rasmus related as many wonderful things of that friend as he thought necessary to give her a sense of the latter's peculiar temper.

Gundenau, his little fez on his head, remained seated in the cushions of his ample arm-chair.

"So this is she!"

Elisabeth bowed and stood with arms lightly hanging at her side, in the middle of the old gentleman's room. The silent noonday sun glowed on the bookcases which showed only mahogany and green hangings. From one corner a bust of Shakespeare looked down at her. She saluted it silently as that of a colleague, friend, and brother. He would help her. Then she turned her quiet, golden-brown eyes to Gundenau, who arose before the command of this glance and said:

"You have the externals, young lady. Now I suppose you think I'll let you go through one of your cut-and-dried parts, all gotten up for the occasion, monologue of Jean d'Arc or Mary Stuart?"

"I'll do whatever you wish."

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"That's better," said Gundenau with a sly air. He went up to one of the book-cases and drew out a pretty eighteenth century volume, fragrant of withered rose-leaves. He held it up to her.

"Do you know this book?"

She read the title.

"*Voices of the Nations in Song*. No, I don't know it; it's lyrical."

"Lyrical, young woman; exactly. Suppose you read us one of these lyrical pieces: for instance, the Scotch ballad, *Edward*."

Surprised, she took up the volume.

"There," he commanded, "sit down in my arm-chair. Read it to yourself five times, ten times; take half an hour. Steep yourself in the tragedy of the poem, and then let's hear you."

He joined his friends at the window and seemed to be looking down into the street. In reality his glance was fixed on a dark corner of the panes in which Elisabeth, who sat in the light, was visibly mirrored. Her left arm supported her thoughtful head with its wandering eyes. Her right wrist lay upon the arm of the chair, her hand holding the book. She sat upright in the first effort of attention. Rasmus regarded her full of admiration.

"Lord, but the woman knows how to sit," he whispered, "like a Greek statue."

Elisabeth had finished her first reading. A light shudder passed over her skin. The artist in her began to conceive. She hastened back to the beginning

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of the poem, crossed her legs, grasped the book with both hands as though it were a snake which she must throttle. Gundenau observed with pleasure this unconscious play of the nerves in her flexible body. That, in itself, was something.

Elisabeth, having read the poem two or three times, dropped book and hands lightly between her knees and sat, deeply stirred, far forward. She was listening to the hissing and whispering in her own soul. She was lying in wait for the subtle feints, the cruel grasp of these great verses to reveal themselves to her fully. All her nerves were alert for that dagger-like thrust with which the poem closes. And now she looked dangerous, for in her heart she was mixing poison. And, like Fredegund, the queen of the Franks, the act of torture gave her a blasphemous joy. She was like a beautiful but evil beast of prey, tense for an onslaught, cowering in the caverns of its own strength.

"Yes, yes, she can sit," Gundenau repeated the words of Rasmus to himself.

Elisabeth, speaking in half-tones, wrestling with her powers of memory which reached out passionately after the verses, repeated the poem softly. Then she arose, pallid with agitation.

"I'll begin."

"One moment!" Gundenau went for a chair. Wigram and Rasmus retained their place by the window.

And Elisabeth began. Her voice sank to a hasty

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whisper, it trembled with tortured curiosity, as of one suddenly coming from a hiding-place where he has waited long:

"Why is thy sword with blood so red?"

And she hissed like one in the grip of a nocturnal terror, hissed out the refrain:

"Edward, Edward!"

Then she restrained herself to an evil and false tone of sympathy:

"Why is thy sword with blood so red
And why walk'st thou so dreary—Oh!"

Then came a weary voice, deprecating, full of deep disgust:

"Oh, I have slain my falcon keen,
Mother, Mother!
Oh, I have slain my falcon keen,
And have not such another—Oh!"

And this last "Oh" was filled with abomination and anger.

Then the first voice began again, insinuatingly, pressingly, charged with an evil hope and a more evil jubilation:

"Thy falcon's blood is not so red,
Edward, Edward!
Thy falcon's blood is not so red!"

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And then the repressed passion broke forth, shamelessly, victoriously,—the passion of gluttoned revenge:

“My son, open thy heart—Oh!”

And this time the monosyllable was full of tense expectation. But stubbornly, and yet full of a sad curiosity, comes the deep, weary voice:

“Oh, I have slain my roan charger,
Mother, Mother!

Oh, I have slain my roan charger,
And proud he was and true—Oh!”

And now the voice had taken on a faint significance of misery and reproachfulness:

“And proud he was and true—Oh!”

But this last “Oh” sounded like a shudder of unwilling resignation and dumb defeat.

Again came the woman’s voice, but this time hurried and angry and urgent, as if desirous of putting an end to the grim comedy:

“Thy charger was old and there was no need,
Edward, Edward!

Thy charger was old and there was no need. . .”

Insolently the final words rang forth:

“Another woe eats in thee—Oh!”

And this “Oh” was like a challenge; it had the intonation of a question.

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With inexpressible power followed the man's thunderous outburst, the easement of a awful despair:

"Oh, I have slain my own father,
Mother, Mother!
Oh, I have slain my own father,
And woe, woe is my heart—Oh!"

And this last "Oh" was long drawn out. It burst forth resonantly, then broke and almost whined. It ceased with almost the moaning sound of a sick child.

There is no need to illustrate further the woman's facile hypocrisy of repentance, utterly rejected by her son's wounded soul, and the whining lamentation of her words:

"And what wilt thou leave for my heart's desire?"
"Edward, Edward?"

But the "Oh" this time rang a sharp change as though her son had suddenly faced her like the last Angel with his Dreadful Sword.

There was a short quivering of the breath, a sudden silence as between lightning and thunder. Then crashed forth the trumpet tone of doom, metallic, terrible, a voice that no one would have thought credible as coming from Elisabeth:

"A curse I will leave thee and hellish fire!
Mother, Mother!"

The words were as of hammered adamant:

"A curse I will leave thee and hellish fire,
For 'twas thy counsel slew him—Oh!"

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And this last cry—more like an “Ah”—was the mightiest of all. It was a jubilation of rage, a desperate relief, a threatening irony. It was a triumphant squaring of the bloody account, as though a stone had rolled from the tortured heart. It was full of an angry, wildly woeful relief. It was out—the monstrous truth.

Elisabeth ceased. Her hands fell to her sides. She seemed humiliated by her own victory.

“Rasmus, don’t speak a word,” implored Gundenau, and for some minutes there was only a breathing silence in the room. Then the old gentleman went up to Elisabeth and took her hand in his.

“You have created anew for us a great tragedy. You *have* the creative gift, and you should soon be a great artist. Go and be patient and rely on my help.”

Rasmus was moved; he shook two tears from the sides of his red nose, and sought to go Gundenau’s laconic simplicity of speech one better. He said:

“You are an Olympian, and this day is unforgettable.”

Wigram said nothing, but his wild, fixed eyes burned and his heart burned.

Elisabeth went and Wigram accompanied her a part of the way.

“Let your great happiness vibrate in you,” he said, “and toll its full noon-tide; such hours are rare enough. I will go silently by your side and think of you.”

III

GUNDENAU had friends at the theater. Hence, some days later, the manager had Elisabeth summoned to his presence, and assigned to her, without giving any reason and not without irritation, a small part. It was a graceful part in an insignificant comedy, and her somber genius could make nothing of it. Hence the critics did not mention her performance, and all the supers looked upon her with irony. A small actress asked acridly:

"What price did you pay for that part?"

"The price of your valuable friendship," Elisabeth rapped out adroitly.

Nevertheless, she was in despair. The actor Epelin, of whom she thought a great deal, said to her: "One mustn't hope to begin as a spoiled and petted star who rents the playwrights and has plays fitted on her as if they were gowns."

And the manager asked: "What will you have? I give you parts in which every actress pleases. That's it—a woman must be able to please. If you haven't the desire to stir, to allure, you haven't a quality that makes a possible actress of every waitress or milliner. What am I to do for you?"

"Give me a classical part," she implored, "only don't put me in light comedy!"

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"Very well: two weeks from now we'll put on Molière's *Tartuffe*. You may play the part of Dorine."

"But that, too, needs amiableness and archness."

"Oh, very well. You want me to tell Baron Gundenau that I give you grateful parts, and that you refuse them."

"Oh no, I'll take it."

Thoroughly perplexed, she left the office. What was she to do? Was she to be forced into playing *ingénue* parts, and have her talent dry up for want of use?

Those were days of an evil pressure. She breathed a weary, miasmic air, and saw above her a heaven without mercy, without anger, without movement. Her delicate nerves became terribly worn. She memorized her part, but the glow of inspiration did not come. There was not a single passage at which her heart could cry out: "This will transport, this will charm."

And so she went to Wigram.

Cyrus Wigram lived on the outskirts of the town, and his single window gave on the rich plain of the South. He loved a limitless prospect. On that dim day on which Elisabeth dragged herself to him in such deep discouragement that her soles seemed to cling to the earth, and her knees to give way, he was standing by his window and observing the gray of the sky as a connoisseur studies the most delicate shadings of an opal. He regarded this melancholy mass

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of cloud as though it had palpable being. He noted the drifting shadows on its surface, and said: "I pierce the secret of your life. I see your might, the enduring sloth of your being, but I will see your end. You, too, must die."

And he observed the secret revolution of the air. He saw the beginning of the end of this dim time. He wanted to go now and look up the meteorological reports to see from what source and in what manner a victorious wind would sweep down upon this monster that hovered over and depressed all the Alpine lands. But he heard a knock, answered "Come in," and saw Elisabeth, weary and disconsolate, in the door.

"You?" he asked. "What has happened?"

"I am unhappy. The god has deserted me. I'm a slave of my nerves. I can't play but by their permission, and they've—stopped! I'm going to make a mess of my new part."

"Ah, you child of a faithless divinity. Time will bring counsel."

"No, no, not in this instance."

The words rang out, and the beautiful, suffering face twitched as though Elisabeth had but come to seek a haven for her tears.

Wigram felt timidly anxious. He was not good at consolation, for in his own heart he let every grief corrode and destroy itself. So he asked questions instead.

"What part have you?"

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"Dorine in *Tartuffe*. Think of it, the witty, flexible, pert, chattering Dorine. They want to throttle my career now."

"Aha!" cried Wigram, "to you, too, the art of acting shows first its slime before it gives you the freedom of its clear waters. Yes, it is the earthiest of all the arts. But take my counsel, and for once fight unfair dealing with its own weapons. Play the part to death."

"Why? How?"

"By the sheer weight of your personality. Force your own idiosyncrasy on the part. Express *yourself* through it; use it as a medium only."

"But how, how?"

"Let us see! Isn't there some passion in Dorine? Surely, her hatred of *Tartuffe*."

"Ah!" cried Elisabeth, who was beginning to understand.

"Take this hatred and raise it to the *nth* power. Play it, repressed and half-hidden if you please, but play it—a hatred that lies in wait, that reveals itself in flashes, but one that quivers through the whole piece and fills it with an intolerable suspense."

"Ah, I see, I see! Oh, you clever man, you dear! A great hatred, yes, *that* I can play."

She threw her fur cap, tippet, and jacket on the bed.

"I bought those things out of my New Year's tips at home."

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The notion of a glowing hatred had hypnotized her already, and these words of hers were involuntarily charged with its electric might.

"I've got the book here," Wigram put in, and opened the little brownish paper-backed volume. "Let us look through the part from the point of view I've suggested."

Elisabeth sat down close to him. She trembled in all her limbs from the nervous strain and sudden relief, while he began to read softly and to make his comments. She spread apart the fingers of her lovely, dull-white hand, and Wigram admired its shape, its nervousness, its passion, as she clung to his arm. He thrilled with her emotion. And in him that emotion became transmuted. Thus, while her flexible body was impassioned through all its fibers for the aim and artistic effort that was before her, he had to fight, to repress himself uninterruptedly, lest that exquisite body and fragrant hair become all in all to him, and Molière's masterpiece less than nothing.

But she read and tested his interpretation. At times her cheeks reddened; at times her pallor stretched to her very throat.

When, in her first enthusiasm, she had finished the reading, twilight stole upon them. She pushed the now illegible book aside and talked on in the growing darkness. Wigram gazed at her until his eyes failed him and the darkness swallowed her pallid image.

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"Now it is night, Elisabeth," he said desperately.

"Yes!" she cried happily; "it is night, and we have forgotten night and day. I can go now—happy! And I thank you, you great, unselfish——"

"It gave me happiness, Elisabeth," he broke in.

"How can I make any return to you," she said, "except to give you my friendship?"

Wigram bowed his head silently.

"It will be a pure, true friendship," she went on, "a communion of spirits. And so, if you will let me, Cyrus, I will come to you in my doubts and my difficulties."

In the darkness she sought his hands and pressed them with her nervous, happy strength. He returned the pressure, but gently.

Then she went. Wigram accompanied her, for a moment, into the illuminated hallway, then turned angrily and scornfully from the reddish glow, and slammed the door of his room behind him.

Now he sat alone in the nocturnal room, whose air was still athrob with her passion and her life. He thought of his uncouth figure, and his heart swelled with unconquerable yearning and recollection and woe. He suffered and fought the whole night through. . . .

It was fortunate for Elisabeth that Eppelin was to take the part of Tartuffe. When, at rehearsal, she began to develop the motive of a growing hatred, her fellow-actors were astonished at her temerity. The actress who played Elmire called the perform-

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ance an insult to the memory of Molière. It was deepening the comedy into tragedy. But Eppelin said:

"*Tartuffe* is a tragedy, just as *le Misanthrope* is one. Molière was full of bitterness, and conceived these comedies in a tragic spirit. But he wrote comedies because he wrote for Frenchmen. The whole play, however, with the exception of the inevitable and wretched adulation of Louis XIV at the end, is tragic. Consider, furthermore," he went on in friendly fashion, "that Miss Koett, by the strong emotion she expresses, and thus evokes, not only raises the significance of my part, but increases the suspense that attends my appearance. Nor is this all. She presents a most effective foil to the alluring charm and sweetness of your Elmire. Also, the irritability of Orgon is made clearer. What more do you want?"

In truth, the performance of *Tartuffe* was laden with tragic suspense.

The audience was one that did not come to enjoy a comedy, but to admire the great master. In the first and second acts Elisabeth merely contented herself with portraying adequately the character of Tartuffe, and with preparing for his appearance. But even here crackled and glowed, now and again, the sparks of her passionate temperament. But when Orgon came on, constantly asking after Tartuffe, while Dorine desired to tell of the sufferings of the unfortunate wife, her acting began to

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gather force and fire. She began tentatively, slowly, and reservedly:

"Two days ago Madame was feverish. . ."

Then she answered Orgon's question slowly and icily, as if she desired to appear indifferent and yet to veil a threat:

"Tartuffe? Ah, he is well."

But the constant, deeply moved attitude and answer of Orgon, "Ah, the good man!" exasperated her, and into the second description of Tartuffe's well-being there stole a tone of grim and icy irony; in the third her disgust broke its bounds; in the last her irrepressible rage surged up fiercely, so that the last lines resounded like the throb of approaching drums:

"He drank for breakfast several quarts of wine
The blood supplying that—Madame—had lost."

The cry of her rage, intensely held in check though it was, vibrated through the house. It affrighted, and yet did not break into the character of the comedy, since this indignation proceeded, after all, from a serving-maid. The last words of the scene, "Now both are very well," she uttered with the grief of bitter resignation. In all this there was no straining of the note. The vibration of the acting—but for that one outbreak—was an inner one. And thus a mood of heavy and tense expectation for the appearance of this evil man was created, and the whole

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play gained in somber power, depth, and suggestiveness.

In all her scenes with Orgon she struck the same note. In the scene, on the other hand, in which she has to scoff at Valère and Mariane, she developed a gentle, melancholy humor. Upon the whole she succeeded admirably in arousing curiosity after Tartuffe, who read his lines in a low, vibrant voice. It sounded like cracked glass, searched the hearts of the audience, made the man not only credible, but even agreeable, since his hypocrisy seemed so artistic, so impassioned, so complete. And, at the moment when Tartuffe steps into the trap prepared for him, a wave of dramatic intensity came from the stage and filled the house. With soft, slow, fox-like tread, seeking to guard himself on every side, the man crossed the stage, and the magic of his low, vibrant voice filled all hearers with a sense of admiration. What a magnificent scamp!

And thus should criminals be depicted on the stage. The actor should see in the most detestable character only the master's impartial perfection of workmanship who, in that creative joy over the character—irrespective of its moral quality—which he has brought forth, approaches the Divine Love which is partial to none of its creatures.

The audience, unprejudiced by previous performances, followed the play with rapt attention. The critical voices, next day, were unanimous. The performance had, indeed, been a sin against the spirit

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of French comedy, but in the direction of German pregnancy and depth. And, just as the moderns stress the landscape in the Odyssey of which Homer thought little, just as Wagner's *Brünhilde* has changed in thirty years, so it is legitimate to interpret the French poets in the light of the modern soul. Analogously, it was said, Miss Koett's Dorine was a failure from the point of view of French comedy. But the actress had shown herself capable of tragic forcefulness, a woman of quivering nervousness and passion, to whom hereafter (it was suggested) the management might profitably assign the position due her gifts.

Next day, carrying newspapers, Eppelin came to see Elisabeth in her suburban home. His coming pierced her. Happiness and glory seemed to attend his steps. The papers seemed lovelier to her than laurel-wreaths. Eppelin pressed her hand, sat down with her in the arbor's mild March sunshine, and read to her. Then, when her pride and her thirst for happiness were satisfied for the moment, he said to her:

"We will work together. You and I can confer greatness on any play, and I have long desired a comrade such as you. I think we will be able to make each other famous. I will see to it that you get the parts which are most suitable to your temper, and you—well, I trust you won't leave me in the lurch, and even go with me if I should change to another stage."

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Bravely Elisabeth gave him her hand, and he went. She looked for some minutes after this admirably thoughtful man, who always reflected with such probity over the works of the masters which he was to interpret. When the interpretation of a work of art was in question, his strength and resistance were unconquerable. In ordinary converse he was distraught, melancholy, and slightly ironical. He defended neither himself nor, often as it was attacked, the honor of his calling. But he did defend his art. He thought of it sixteen hours a day, and during the other hours he dreamed of it. He lived an honor of his profession and of our day, in which there are men who are willing to live and die for art.

Elisabeth admired the way in which, hesitatingly at first, he attacked a given problem, weighed it, tested it, illuminated it from every side. This deep thoughtfulness and silence won her soul. For she herself flung her whole being upon a problem and conquered it. She needed a single flash of inspiration, and the complete solution at once.

His very gait seemed characteristic of him. He was to her a living symbol of thought—thought that grapples with obstacles and so wins a slow but momentous victory. Wigram was different, more like herself. Eppelin's spirit was like a light breeze, turning the leaves of a book. It was silent, blessed, and beautiful. . . .

Once in her life she had loved—a neighbor's son. It had been a tenderness expressed across the divid-

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ing fence of the two houses. The simple, timid lad had been drafted into the army, and so her faithfulness had endured for three years (from her sixteenth to her nineteenth). Then he had come back, sure of himself, noisy, impudent, desiring to grasp victoriously what he held to be his property. She had shrunk back. She detested loud and grasping men, she hardly knew why. Perhaps because there was in herself too much of stormy will-power, and she had little admiration for her own nature.

IV

As the theatrical season approached Spring, the whole city was full of stormy battles which, in a metropolis, are usually fought out underground. But in Graz two fierce parties were formed, like the blues and the greens of the chariot-races in Byzantium. The question that divided these parties was: whether the theater was to have a new manager or not. And this fight involved the question of the preponderance of opera over drama. And, since the modern public is more easily approachable by music, the attacking party had a hard time.

Graz—it should be kept in mind—is a city that lies, like a chance-flung boulder, at the foot of the Northern mountains, and gazes dreamily across the plains of the South. It dreams of the storms on the heights, of the battles of the forests, while all about it still meadows hum sweetly, and the silent sunshine of the fields trembles over nodding flowers. Many old people live in this town, who are spending their latter days in peace, and who have no lack of leisure. They are done with the illusions of life, and devote themselves to the fairer illusion of art.

And in Graz you will also find the wild, fermenting youth of the chill Alpine lands. And in the two universities are gathered no less the impassioned chil-

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dren of the South—Italians and Slavs. Thus one section of the population is no longer in the turmoil of the difficult, draining, cruel forces of life—the other has not yet been dragged into the whirl. And so art is the mistress of much free time and many free souls. An actor is observed and talked about, and every strong individuality tends to become the hero of cyclic myths. Elisabeth, simple, austere, and usually lonely, otherwise in converse with quaint half-unknown people who were equally lonely, excited through her proud poverty a timid admiration. The whole town was stormily anxious to have her stay; to observe her development, and to see who would be—her first lover.

Her parents were but little satisfied with the measure and quality of her success. The salary was wretchedly small. Gundenau gave her only a very little in addition, and confined his admiration of her to the ostentatious vantage-point of his box. The wealthy lovers, the extravagant gentlemen of fashion, seemed as far away as ever. And why? Why? That's what the old people couldn't quite comprehend. What was the use of being an actress if you couldn't turn men's heads?

At the end of the season the tumult of the contending factions died out. But first they gave the retiring manager and his operatic artists a great ovation, replaced the horses of their carriages, and forced them to six or nine farewell addresses. And when, as a last blow, the report circulated that Ep-

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pelin and Miss Koett—the chief non-operatic artists—were also going away, a mighty roar of despair arose outside the stage-door. Eppelin was taken up and carried on the backs of fierce admirers; Elisabeth stood against the door, three steps above the crowd, and thus hoped to render unnecessary the Germanic hoisting on a shield. But these impassioned youths stormed up to her, tore off her Summer-shawl—her dearest and best garment—and shredded it into a hundred bits, which, souvenirs of the great tragic actress of the future, were taken possession of by student and workingman, clerk and soldier.

The grand “row” which resulted from this incident had the advantage of permitting Eppelin and Elisabeth a quiet escape. He pressed her hand: “Just the contrary of what these good folk think happens, actually, to be true. The new manager is thoroughly interested in you. He has consulted me, and we’re going to be engaged together.”

Very happy and half in love she came home and told with a sort of happy regret the story of her torn shawl.

“So those are the admirers you’ve gained,” her mother shrilled. “Instead of giving you clothes, they tear the few rags that you’ve bought off your back!”

And for all that Elisabeth could do, the woman went to a newspaper office and, to the delight of the editors, complained bitterly of the destructive enthusiasm of the hot-blooded youth of Graz.

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The reporters made of the incident a charming story which won all hearts. The consequence was that, next day, eleven shawls of varying quality came to the suburban janitor's house. Eight of these shawls Elisabeth's mother sold most profitably. But the girl cried a good deal on that day, considering that her confessed poverty had won her more friends than her art, and that her success in life had opened with the receiving of alms. . . .

Then Summer came.

Elisabeth had failed to obtain an engagement at one of the Summer theaters. "They play nothing but frothy comedies," she complained to her friend Eppelin, when he came to take leave of her.

"Save your passion," he counselled, "store it up against the Autumn, dearest friend! Then you will conquer all hearts—including mine."

He looked deep, deep into her eyes and went, but his last words remained thorn-like in her heart. Ah, that is what she would do! And it was in her, she knew, that piercing magic without which no woman is a woman. But for the sake of a high and severe conception of art she had suppressed that part of herself wholly. Now she determined to liberate her whole self and not to throttle the woman in her heart. It had been Wigram's fault that she had conceived of her art with such virile austerity. "One should follow oneself alone," she told herself. So the Summer passed in a silent contest with Wigram, whom she saw daily.

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Gundenau had invited herself, Rasmus, and Wi-gram, to spend some weeks at a country-house he had, south of the city, upon a silent, fertile height. Where the beautiful oval of the Graz valley narrows about the river Mur, there stand a row of charming little country-seats on heights among forest, fruit, and grain like enchanted warders of the dale. In this region, the heart of Steiermark, nearly every eminence is blessed with a view for the sake of which, in hidden valley-lands, people would erect tall look-out pavilions. Here, high above the world and its turmoil, old Gundenau sat on a *chaise-longue*, in order to watch the clouds that rolled their shifting glories across the fertile plain. There they passed through the gleaming sunshine—streamers of white silk, heavenly sheep. And there the leaves of aspen and poplar twinkled and trembled. For the lightest currents of the air stir the life of these trees.

“Ah,” said Gundenau, “what is man, after all, since his truest happiness consists in vegetating in the good sunlight? There he lies, opening the petals of his soul, and all his pores drink in, like thirsty children, the moods and changes of the world’s central force.”

Rasmus likewise lay, as if crucified to the earth, upon the greensward, tasted the joy of exquisite indolence, and listened to the lullabies of the trees. When the soft wind came, which caresses these heights gently, he would shut his eyes and say: “I hear the hemlocks to the North. And now the pine-trees

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are murmuring: I scent their fragrance. And now the linden is speaking; its voice is soft as its foliage."

He luxuriated in sound. The glare and colorfulness of these days dazzled his sight. So he eliminated that sense from the symphony of his delights. If freshly washed linen was hung out in the wind to dry, he sought a place near it and chatted with it. And when a storm came with its great cloud-masses, he begged the frightened maid-servants to leave of these dancing linen ghosts at least Elisabeth's shifts. "These," he said, "are stirred to tragic altitudes, and whisper to me troubling, alluring secrets. Ha, they're trying to fly away. Take hold of them. I know everything, Elisabeth."

Elisabeth was often on the point of flight. While these two men dreamed and Wigram wandered about alone, she sat still and thought: "How futile, how futile all this is."

Her heart burned and she went to the great stone from which one had a view of the North. Where the valley rose toward the hills, there spread the city, the camp where her life's battle really lay. She could see the gleaming of the roofs, could see whole streets picked out by the sunlight, and could hear, when the winds held their breath, the faint, far noises of the city. And if, at such moments, a peasant's cart with its peaceable little horse clattered along the forest way, her heart filled with misery and rage because the trampling of the hoofs deadened for her the voice of

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the city. For the city was to her the dwelling-place of her art and also of the great game of her fate. There lay her triumphs, there her disappointments. It seemed to her often now like a huge kaleidoscope which had flung her—a useless bit of colored glass—out of the richness of its shifting pattern. Did it no longer desire its plaything of the theater? “Ah,” she thought, “the long evenings of Winter will come, and then I shall be desired once more to show the life, the glory, and passion which the common life of man cannot compass.

Once Rasmus caught her thus and asked sadly:

“Are you home-sick for the city?”

“Yes,” Elisabeth confessed, “tell me something of what is going on down there. Or tell me of Vienna. You’ve been there. How do the great actresses there look? Am I like them?”

“Not at all,” Rasmus answered. “They have long ceased to be what you are, a woman desirous of revealing across the footlights the height and depth of man’s life. Their souls are a mosaic of all the thousand desires and perversities of the great city. They believe in the godhead of the ostrich-plume, of diamonds, silk, and lace. To them the lofty peaks of human achievement are represented by a faultless swallow-tail, a box for the season, and a racing-stable. They have faith in every idol of the marketplace, and condemn all that the world condemns. They tread upon precious carpets, they——”

She interrupted him abruptly.

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"What do you think one of those lovely rugs costs the Baron?"

"Those are genuine Oriental weaves; five thousand *gulden*."

"Heavens!" she cried, "I'm a far way from that!"

Rasmus was easily led into another conversational channel, and chimed in with her mood.

"Next year your salary will be two thousand *gulden*, and your engagement short. Don't take a longer one. If you feel drawn to Vienna, you must get there. I'm going there myself. Gundenau has recommended me to the old Count Ziebern. The latter's son is a bit timid, and lives foolishly. He knows no measure. One day he wants to act the part of the *grand seigneur*, next day that of a monk. He's bored when he's left to his own society. And so, since Gundenau thinks I'm an amusing person——"

"Are you?" said Elisabeth and looked at the melancholy Rasmus in a new way. "Well, then, amuse me, please!"

"You'll have to wait a little," he assured her. "I'm still attuned to the Gundenau mood, and must (like a phonograph) slip a new record into my machinery. But I'll amuse you, first, with an anecdote. Whatever you wish: my first love, my first spree, a night in Vienna, a picnic with sweet girls, the story of my deepest hatred, Venice seen through the eyes of a Casanova, or the history of the serenade which I and

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seven others played for a girl who deceived each of us with all the rest; or else——”

“Oh,” cried Elisabeth, “that will be charming. Tell me the maddest things you know, only please, please, no more Gundenau moods.”

V

ELISABETH had found herself. She blossomed forth and even persuaded Wigram to join in her cheerfulness. Of an evening the three young people would go arm in arm, sing, chat, and, sometimes, Elisabeth would flatter the anecdotal Rasmus, sometimes the thoughtful Wigram. And so the two men ended by feeling each other's presence to be, in a sense, torture. Wigram fought down this overpowering jealousy as best he could: Rasmus's feeling did not exceed a slight occasional doubt, for he knew himself to be more successful with women than his friend.

Rasmus often made Elisabeth laugh at the relentless carelessness of the philosopher's garb. He would invent humorous names for him, or describe him taking a bath, so that Elisabeth would shriek with laughter. But there was no rancor in all this, for Rasmus truly loved all things and men, and not least the uncouth but original Wigram. So that every outburst ended with the words: "But what a passion for thought he has! What glow of soul, what proud forlornness! He's a great fellow, for all we may say."

And thus it came about that Elisabeth often experienced a slight remorse when she was alone with Wigram and asked her questions: "What do you

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think of the character of Rautendelein? Or of the girl who drags the Master Builder to his doom, or Ellida, who desires to choose freely, or Nora, or that splendid Hedda?"

A question was enough. He would at once let his mind bite itself into the subject, and she listened delightedly to his drastic declarations: "Do you know," he would say, "our plethoric society has chased after all desires. It seeks the blue distance in whirring motor-cars, only to find a few mud-huts at the end of its quest. It swallows authors by the dozen, and dots its cities with theaters. Everything, everything can be had on its market-place, except men—complete men. Such have died out because there is no demand for them. And so the women, who are accustomed to have everything, become ravenous ogres. They experiment with men, start each time with a subtle presentiment, and end in disgust and contempt. Two or three men scarcely suffice for a season. And then these women, who are so empty themselves, raise a great cry of reproach against those whose souls they have found equally void. Equally void, I say, but not so avid. For there it is: men are more easily satisfied, but women have this eternal greed for the souls of men, the greed that marks all the characters you mention. Are these Heddas and Noras greater than their sisters whom they despise? Only in that greed for the spiritual man whom the very society in which they live has destroyed and lost. And hence it is that our rich women carry with them that ex-

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pression of gentle suffering. It is this fact that makes their eyes half-expectant, half-disconsolate, that gives their hands that nervous grasp. They knead a dream. And you have seen their lovely, listening throats, bent forward ever, their quivering lips, and their cheeks which are no longer muscles, but nerves. Our time has produced men who conquer all things, attain all things, enjoy all things, are apt for all uses, but have lost the depth of the immortal secret of life. And thus a new woman has arisen—yourself, Elisabeth, are such an one—to whom no distance is too far upon her quest, who must seek and seek and seek. The noblest of them find, in the end—their own true selves.”

“Ah, I should like to play the parts of such women!” she cried. And then she linked her arm with that of her somber friend, and said: “You are one of those rare men, Wigram, only you are all kernel, all divine inwardness, and no fruit. No sweetness of indulgence illumines your barren days. Do you believe that any lovely woman will care to satiate her thirst with your kisses. Why don’t you set your clever head the task of earning a few thousand *gulden*? Then put on the garb of this world, and go into the drawing-rooms and tell them the truth you have found, and write books that will make you famous, and surround yourself with the colors of the fruits of this world. Don’t you suffer in your obscurity? Adopt the elegance of Gundenau’s friends. A barber could make a fine character head of that

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uncouth block of yours, could make a demi-god of you. Do all that, Wigram, and I'll fall in love with you."

He grew alternately hot and cold. But she turned the conversation aside.

"What do you work at all day over your notes and manuscripts?"

"A book."

"What good does it do you? Down in the streets is the tumult of life. And you sit, writing, with bent back and trembling hand and glowing head and battling soul! The others live and suffer: you groan and strive and—write!"

"O you child of life," he answered with his somber smile. "O you child of life, sent by life to mirror its own multiformity, don't you know that in those hours that seem so lost to you, I myself *am* the world? Do you not know that then I contain more of life than all that hopes and hates, suffers and sorrows on the world's highway? Do you not understand that I have everything, that I am blessed?"

"Forgive me, Cyrus," she said, "I do honor you and your aims truly. I could almost love you. . . ."

It wasn't the sincere truth that she spoke. But she had to act, the impulse was too strong. And during this summer she learned the art of playing herself into the most various hearts. With Rasmus she was a good comrade. They laughed together, stole potatoes from the fields, lit a fire in the woods to bake them, went about to the farmsteads and made

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the farmers compliments. A desire and a power had taken hold of her to tell all men what they loved to hear. Rasmus was enchanted with the soft breath of flattery that she breathed upon all. Even Gundenau would sit erect in his armchair and gaze at her as though she had become another. Jestingly he flirted with her, called himself her lover and, since he had no longer the gift of youth to offer, he had to be content with quirps and jests which fell from him as sadly and beautifully as golden leaves from an autumnal tree.

Once there came on a visit a good-looking young fellow who didn't in the least dress himself like the other gentlemen, showing no desire to be thought an Englishman. As an offset he dressed French fashion like a young Parisian artist. His large, soft hat, his sack-coat, his silk-shirt, his very trousers, had a flowing, streaming effect. And all about him, except his bronzed face, was white or light-blue. He looked as if the winds had blown him across the mountains. This was the Alcibiades of Graz, young Ferdinand Hiller, heir of a great firm, and quite useless except in society. He had served for a year in a cavalry regiment, and had come in contact with the city's rather reserved nobility through his love and knowledge of horses. He cared for little except beautiful horses, had a magnificent stable, drove about all day, and talked of little else. Then, suddenly, he sold his stable and bought one motor-car after another. He always kept a minimum of two, a larger car and a

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smaller, and never was to be seen in either unaccompanied by an actress or singer. So he raised the dust again and was happy. Now, in the summer season, alone with his chauffeur in a huge touring-car, he visited the country-seats of his friends.

"What, Miss Koett is here?" he laughed when he was told who the guests were. "Poor thing!"

Nevertheless, he stayed a day longer than he had intended to, and was pleased that Elisabeth had grown womanlier. "Do you know," he said to her naïvely, "we don't care nowadays for these tall sybils à la Michael Angelo. Our women take shorter steps. Not tripping ones, to be sure. A sense of something between crime and pleasure—that's what we demand of our heroines. And you mustn't any longer love or hate with your heart, not even with your head. Nerves, nerves—the dear chaotic nerves: there's the cry of modernity. Do you smoke?"

"No, lord and master," she smiled.

"Do so; it makes one nervous, gives one a sort of quiet, slothful, dreamy, sensuous nervousness that is truly modern."

"Baron Gundenau achieves the same effect by the use of sky and clouds without tobacco."

"Yes, but you haven't those things always at hand. At all events," he went on, "don't forget to cultivate a certain style at once. Of a lady who smokes nothing should be distinctly visible but her toes, knees, and throat. One should model one's pose on that of a Bacchic Mænad, with head thrown back.

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Of course, that's only my individual taste. Only one must cultivate one's style. How do you smoke, Rasmus?"

"Like Goethe," Rasmus answered quietly.

"That is to say; not at all. And you, Wigram?"

"Oh, when I begin to think I light one cigarette after another. When I'm in the midst of work, I let them go out . . ."

"Ah, you happy man!"

There was genuinely honest envy and warmth in the exclamation of the young worldling. Wigram, just because he disdained to compete with worldly people on their own ground, gained from such of them as were capable of any thoughtfulness a kind of timid admiration. He seemed to them like a scarce decipherable runic stone dating from a mysterious age. But rapidly the young man turned again to Elisabeth.

"What do you think, Miss Koett? Shall we take my car and rush for a while out into the world?"

Elisabeth trembled with pleasure at the thought. But she spoke with a touch of irony.

"Heaven, I don't think I'm half fashionable enough to be exhibited to society by you!"

Hiller was a bit startled. He recovered himself.

"I didn't think of offering you a drive in the *corso* merely. I want to show you wood and valley, hill and resounding cliff. You will hear the echo of my chauffeur's horn, and think the old days of the postilion have come back."

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"No," she said, "take me down to the city. It doesn't matter whether I'm seen with you. And I'd like to see if everything down there is still so dead and quiet and country-like."

She uttered the last word with frank contempt.

"Who'll come along?" Hiller cried merrily. "It's just for the day; we'll spend the night here again."

"I'll go," said Rasmus.

Gundenau looked at the weather and the clouds.

"Well, so will I."

"Good, and you, Wigram?"

"I can't. I'm troubled with thought."

"That's right; think for us all. Pay our debts in that kind, you Cræsus. We'll be thoughtless enough. Shall we start?"

"As you like."

"Very well. Where's my gentleman in the leather suit? All aboard!"

The car whizzed off and the pebbles flew. Down the steep way it sped, into the valley of the Mur—the center of a comet's tail of dust. It seemed to lash the road it left behind it and—was gone. Only the silvery tones of the horn could be alluringly heard as it played with the echoes of forest and hill.

Wigram stared down into the valley. His suffering heart was heavy, heavy.

"There she flies. She will belong to the rich, light men of the market-place, like all the others. She will not, in lonely greatness, brood with me over the thoughts of the poets. A few weeks ago she was a

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reserved, shy, glowing girl. To-day she is a woman who radiates admiration and love. And she will learn her lesson better and better."

Yes, she flew away from him and left him with his somber, tragic love.

"She's coming back to-night. But the day will come when she will go from me and not come back, and I shall hear her name only upon alien lips and with unlovely comment."

He strode across the heights, passed wayside cross, chapel, and great fir-trees, passed houses and fields, to the great look-out mountain, and gazed southward. Here murmured the noble chestnut-trees and the beech-trees, and doves cooed in the distance. But he could not think. All the magnificence of the world could not carry him to his wonted altitude. The cooing of the doves enchanted him with its soft rhythm; it sounded like the voice of Elisabeth. And, in his powerlessness, he murmured words that were not meant to have rhyme and meter:

"In the golden-green bushes,
Soft and tenderly I call
Like the wild and hidden dove,
Shyly, yet again forever,
Thy dear name."

It was no song, no ending, but it brought relief. He repeated the few lines over and over, and returned, distraught, to the house.

"How can I escape? By flight. I can't. And then—these summer days will soon be over . . ."

VI

Soon young Hiller left, throwing back a merry *au revoir* to Elisabeth. The world about the little castle grew silent and blue and silvery. September had come, and with it the apparently endless days of the South Styrian summer. This season is like the Indian summer of the Canadian lakes, when forest, field, and the immeasurable distance glow with such glory of hue as though the earth were an iridescent soap-bubble.

Toward the East, hill glimmers behind hill, golden-green, steel-green, dark-blue, ultramarine, and light-blue, all colors losing themselves in that dream-distance where heaven and earth embrace. There lies the sunlight. Toward the West there is another kind of form and color. Sharply defined and definitely shaded one horizon projects behind another, almost like stage-scenery. It is, in truth, a time that takes the soul captive. The landscape lies, sweet and ripe, in the silvery weather; there is an echo of singing in the air; the windmills waken from their dreams; the orchards breathe their fragrance under the yearning kiss of the departing sun, and the wind plays with the delicate, reddened leaves as it hurries them across the scene.

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"Open your heart, Elisabeth," Wigram implored in those days, "and look about you."

But she turned darkly glowing eyes toward the city: her time, *her* time was beginning.

Then came her last day upon those heights. Wigram walked beside her, and his heart was as heavy as the lump of gold in the fairy-well. On the edge of the beech-forest the wind had split a tree so that it had to be felled. Now the great pieces lay upon the earth, and from under the bark oozed out the living sap.

"Look, Elisabeth," Wigram called to her in delight.

"What? Where?"

"Yonder, the wasps!"

"The wasps; ah, yes." To please him she stopped.

And yet it was a sight worth stopping for. Around the edge of the fallen trunk whence the sap oozed, the wasps fluttered and trembled about each other with their nervous golden-brown wings. It was a thick, pearly interplay of yellow-ringed little bodies. They were drunken with the sweet ichor as though they knew the summer to be offering its impassioned guests a last meal. They did not swarm or sting as Wigram stepped nearer. They trembled and drank and sucked.

"O life, life!" cried Wigram. "In a few weeks they will be motionless and dead, these dwellers upon sunny fences and barns, these lovers of sweets. And how utter is their enjoyment now! Did the immortal

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gods ever so rejoice? Is this quivering joy not immortal? Look, Elisabeth, look!"

"I don't see much to look at," she said, wondering.

Then they went on, and he was sad at heart because from her was hidden the happiness of seeing, at every step, the movement of the inner nature of the world, of which so many falsehoods have been spoken, but which is not invisibly beyond our reach, but which, to the seeing eye, reveals itself hourly . . .

Next day Elisabeth sat, studying her new part, in a niche of the bastions of the *Schlossberg* which Wigram had pointed out to her. The September sun went through and through her, and her body jubilated in a sense of the beauty of the day and the beauty of life. At this time she enjoyed the sun because she was enjoying her part. The instinct for nature was a secondary one with her. The convulsive battle of life, the cry of passionate joy, or the silence of deep absorption—in a word, all the phenomena of human life—in these she lived and moved.

Her ambition to be great throbbed mightily. A new manager had come: an insignificant actor, but a notable personality. How far his ecstatic devotion to art was perfectly sincere, might have been questionable. It mattered little. He burned with a priestly spirit, preached from behind the foot-lights, and once more forced the town into divided factions. He made the stage seem more important than the university or the affairs of the commonwealth. And

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thus actors and actresses trod the parks and streets in a reflected glory.

But Elisabeth sat amid the crumbling stones of the old fortification, and her pulses beat out one phrase: *Deserve your flame! Deserve to live so potently in the consciousness of men.* And she opened her manuscript and read all her thirsty passions into the part.

Lady Macbeth! How she had longed to play the part of this woman, who desired to be stronger than man, and who died in this straining of her natural strength. But now she read on and on in gathering terror. Ah, if she could have played the part a year ago, when all her thoughts were fixed so intensely upon her art. Now the desires of life had sprung up in her, now her glances sought love, and now—now they gave her the part of that woman who had been able to say that she would have dashed her infant's brain out when it smiled upon her. What could she do with all this? To be sure, Wigram had told that each age might bring to art its own interpretation, and that especially the greatest poets in whom the soul of the world speaks most clearly carry its own meaning to every age. But how could a woman, in this age that yearns for peace, speak words that had been uttered in an iron day, within sight of rack and wheel, in the cold fury of the North Sea storms.

But while, confused, frightened, dissatisfied, she played with the idea of the book, Wigram came

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along. Either he himself had wanted to sit in his wonted niche, or he had come to find Elisabeth. She called to him as he turned the vine-clad corner:

"Come over here, Cyrus, and help me!"

"What is it?" he asked, coming toward her and standing still.

"I am to play Lady Macbeth."

"Ah, that's fine!"

"Ah, but, Wigram, I'm all woman, and Goethe has rightly called this dreadful creature a super-witch."

"Not rightly," Wigram said quietly.

"Why not?"

"Don't you feel how she exaggerates all her statements monstrously, how she must do so to move the heavy nature of her husband? Don't you see what deep breaths she draws to force herself to each of these tremendous pronouncements? Shuddering and with eyes desperately closed, she staggers to her own terrible words and deeds. She was a woman, weak as any, but she had loved her husband so deeply that she had learned to throw her womanhood into the breach of his shortcomings. Look for the woman in the part. Unless she is forced directly to feign, you will find her such in every one of the longer speeches. And when her words are few, each word quivers with fear and agony. Give me the book.—Isn't there a deep tenderness in that reproach to her husband:

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'Yet do I fear thy nature;
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness. . .
What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily.'

Isn't that tenderly said? Why, next, must she call upon the 'murdering ministers' who 'wait on nature's mischief,' if she were not full of fear? And it is this terror that you must throw into the words:

'Stop up the access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose nor keep peace between
The effect and it.'

Yes, pity and sympathy and peace are in her soul: it is the strain of an absorbing love that drives her. See how she suffers:

'That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry, "Hold, hold!"'

Gladly would she have known nothing of all that horror:

'What beast was't then
That made you break this enterprise to me?'"

"Very well," said Elisabeth, "but read on:

'I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dashed the brains out, had I sworn as you
Have done to this.'

Isn't that terrible? "

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"Yes," said Wigram; "just there you see the strain, the exaggeration into which she lashes herself. You must speak those words as if you yourself shuddered at them. Deep under your voice there must lie and resound a quivering: It is too much, *too* much! And soon enough she breaks down. She had to drink to keep her courage up, and yet every sound makes her wince. And how ineffably sad and agonized are her words:

'It was the owl that shrieked, the fatal bellman
Which gives the stern'st good-night.'

Is that not full of soul, Elisabeth?"

"Yes," Elisabeth answered, "and here, indeed, she utters words which show that she was not truly capable of the crime, words that sound a note of throbbing pity and love:

'Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done 't.'"

"Do you see it, Elisabeth?" he asked eagerly. "And note, too," he went on, "how her heart echoes and quivers when she repeats the words of her husband:

'A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight!'

See how the cold shivers shake her when she implores:

'Consider it not so deeply!'

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And finally don't miss the full expression of her heart's most intimate terror:

'These deeds must not be thought
After these ways: so, it will make us mad.'

A little farther down she loses grip utterly and stammers, 'what do you mean?' And then for the last time she gathers all the strength of her weakness. Trembling, weeping with rage at her own weakness, she performs the dreadful necessary acts. Her succeeding hypocrisy doesn't strain her so. Rather does the womanly acting instinct give her a chance to draw breath. But when she is alone, in the night-walking scene! Surely you can play that, Elisabeth, the agony of a poor, weak, broken heart."

"Oh, yes, now I can!"

"Consider, Elisabeth, that crime is human, too, and so strive to portray the woman humanly. Where that old time spoke in terms of tough sinews, do you speak in terms of nerves, and you will make all souls tremble and sin and repent with you. There is no part that should not compel the hearer's love, in whose heart the actor must be able to evoke sympathy, even for the criminal. For in the last analysis, Elisabeth, it is the great, dire Worm of the World that incites all these things, that crawls and quivers and twitches in all hearts." He took a deep breath. "And now I will go, Elisabeth, and write concerning the manner of the death of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, for that belongs in my book—my great work."

"What great work?"

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"It's hard to define it yet. But it will be a complete philosophy of life. Good-by, most beautiful friend, and be wholly—a woman."

Elisabeth leaned back when she was alone, and let all the sweetness and significance which the poet's creation had gained, stream through her. She would play with Eppelin. Did she love him, she wondered! Why did her thoughts revert to the vivacious young Hiller, the hero not of the day, but of the *jour fixe*, not of the deep hour of twilight, but of the five o'clock tea? She felt a certain tenderness for both, for Eppelin in her capacity of artist and woman. And for Hiller, in what capacity? Well, Wigram had once told her that anyone who can serve us soon grows to be congenial. Did she already possess that secret gift of the actress to conceive passion under the stimulus of an ability to own motor-cars? "What's the use of boring into one's consciousness?" she said to herself. "All those must love me who follow my acting with sympathy, terror, and joy. Even Wigram counsels me to be all woman."

"And now I am to play the part of Eppelin's wife! Ah, I can do that wonderfully. For in himself will then arise the yearning to possess such a woman."

And she read on and on, striving to read into the various passages all that there was in them of varied love, terror, repression, weariness, or remorse. These things she would make all men feel.

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A few days later Eppelin came to her and showed her with quiet self-satisfaction a couple of cut-rate tickets to Vienna that he had procured.

"What are those for?" she asked.

"They are going to play *Macbeth* in the *Burg-theater*," he said in a happy voice. "We can go there and study great methods."

Elisabeth sprang up.

"I won't go, not I! I'm full of tones and pictures. Do you want me to mix all that, to make it turbid?"

"Do come," he implored; "one shouldn't ever be above learning something."

"Even if I feel that, in this matter, I'm capable of giving instruction?"

"And what if that instruction is all wrong?"

"It's mine, at all events. I have to act with *my* voice, with *my* lips, eyes, hands, with *my own* heart!"

"You are too arrogant, Elisabeth!"

"And you too timid, Eppelin!"

He was hurt and offered the second ticket to Wigram, who took it gladly.

But she felt suddenly that Eppelin and herself were not children of the same spirit.

VII

So Eppelin and Wigram journeyed to Vienna, in order to see the *Hofburg* performance of *Macbeth*. And Eppelin was fortunate. He learned all there was to be learned and, in addition, took to heart what Wigram told him. The latter argued that *Macbeth* was still much misunderstood, that the majority of actors looked upon the play as one of mere horrors, and that even the best modern performance can but succeed in teaching you what not to do.

In Vienna the part of *Macbeth* himself was taken by an actor who might have played well, for he was a secretive individual with a subdued voice. But he pitched his voice too high, not reflecting that meditations cannot be so uttered. The part of Lady *Macbeth* was taken by one of the most nervously restless actresses of the day. Had she brought only a measure of true insight to her interpretation of the part, all might have been well. The same was true of the man. But, on the contrary, he jumped, stormed, cried out in terror till the rafters rang and clattered as much as possible with the metal plates of his armor. Similarly the woman shrilled and hissed, spat and shrieked, so that finally there wasn't a shred of human nature left in the whole performance. The witches shrieked in bedlamite fashion, instead of

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speaking in the ominous whispers of the desolate moor itself. At the prophetic moment ("All hail, Macbeth; that shall be king hereafter!"), Macbeth in order to mark his emotional state, struck his breastplate with his mailed fist. A clatter went across the scene, in which Banquo could next have whispered so significantly:

"Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair?"

And thus it went on from scene to scene. Everywhere the true mood of the play, its master-note, of dim presentiment and awestruck silence, was coarsely torn to tatters. And, at the end, where Macbeth, in the terrible relief of his utter desperateness, casts himself almost deliberately into the arms of doom and death—even here the voice, triumphant and unfettered, of life itself, was turned into the hollow mouth-
ing of the stage.

Eppelin and Wigram looked at each other. The former was still in doubt and hardly knew what to say. Wigram did not become talkative until the performance was over, and they were on their long walk to their lodgings.

"Heavens!" he exclaimed, "I don't envy the manager or the actors the puzzled state of mind with which they must have attacked their notion of the play. It's incredible. *Macbeth* is an undiscovered play. Because if it isn't understood at the *Burg-theater*, which is probably still the first of all Ger-

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man stages—where are you to expect understanding?”

“It may be,” Eppelin said nervously, “and I want to hear all you’ve got to say. But do you suppose for a moment that we, in our bit of a provincial barn, can surpass the achievement of this famous institution?”

“Not as far as the *ensemble* goes, of course, but in a flexible, vigorous, and open-eyed interpretation of individual passages, without doubt. For instance: Macbeth ought never to be loud-voiced; he ought never to be permitted to appear with the seal of crime already upon him. He is a man fulfilled of faith and courage, but an incorrigible dreamer. Look at the play itself. Isn’t he described there as dreaming, meditating. How is he spoken to: ‘Look, how our partner’s rapt,’ or ‘Your face is as a book where men may read strange matters.’ Does he not himself speak of his ‘dull brain’? He is a man of dreams to whom nothing is but that which is not. In the light of these things we must inquire into Macbeth’s life before the opening of the play. He was a man, evidently, of fantastic dreams and of silence. Throughout half the play the achievement of silence is his aim; his words are wrung from him against his will. He hesitates, he ponders, but always in the secret chambers of his soul. He is a man of torturing reserve, and even when he speaks out, his utterances are oracular and dreamful. There’s something of the somnambulist in his whole being. There you

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have the key-note to your interpretation. The part must be played with infinite repression; his voice must be like the sound of a muffled drum. Only at the last, when he conceals nothing more, there must be a peal as of brazen clarions.

"Thus, to take a specific instance, the scene with Banquo's ghost is to be played with repression and with but little external movement. Again, both before and after his bloody deed, he is, as it were, petrified. Only after the second prophecy of the witches does he put shame aside. Now he *desires* to be a murderer. Hitherto he has been driven: now his own momentum bears him on. Until this change in him takes place, he only strains after the magnitude of crime. Never is he utterly devoid of soul and warmth. How gently he speaks of Duncan, how greatly of Banquo, how tenderly of his wife! As long as he hesitates—true to his real self—he loves her, and she knows that he needs her. For that reason she strains to monstrosity the powers of her nature. Not till he is hurried along, alone, to the grimness of his fate, does an impatient word concerning her death escape him. Nay, until then he is all love and tenderness and care. She is not to learn of Banquo's death, for her conscience is sufficiently burdened already. And on the sheer brink of his own doom his slow, deep, thoughtful words are still of her.

'Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,

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Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet, oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?'

Not till every hope has abandoned him does he fall into that mad haste which makes his fall like the thunder of an avalanche. And yet his last words are for her, though in his voice a nervous haste should now have replaced the old meditative tone. And even a moment before his fall, how deeply felt are his words to Macduff:

'Of all men else I have avoided thee:
But get thee back; my soul is too much charged
With blood of thine already.'

"And when, finally, death is at hand, an iron, laconic matter-of-factness masters his words. In the face of doom all his true heroism breaks forth. If the horror of his soul and the love he bears his wife have heretofore reconciled one to him, that office is now performed by his stubborn heroism, the relief at his redemption.

'They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,
But, bear-like, I must fight the course.'

And, Eppelin, I would that the archangel Michael might lend you the magnificent thunder of his voice for those words of death:

'Before my body
I throw my war-like shield: lay on, Macduff!'

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Then come the last words, hacked by the hacking of the swords:

'And damn'd be him that first cries, Hold! enough!'

Wigram's voice dropped to silence as a flame smolders. He had experienced anew the deepest of all tragedies. Now, for the first time, he glared at the man beside him.

"What are you doing, Eppelin?"

"Making notes. What you say is worth thinking about. I'll see whether it's possible to read the lines as you suggest. You demand a great deal. Nevertheless . . ."

Elisabeth was relieved when she heard that Wigram had persuaded her partner to represent Macbeth more humanly and more soulfully.

At rehearsal Eppelin acted as if he had given the play its new soul. But in this matter he was quite unconscious. For he was the clever, thoughtful, industrious actor of our day, who carries to his art, often enough, a futile excellence of intention, but who is, in the end, a creature of his reading and his instruction. He simply arranges what he has learned. Whether from Wigram or from a book: it hardly mattered. And, after all, the deed itself, the acting, was his own. And here, where a heavy, slow-breathing mood was to be indicated, his nerves understood their task, and actor and manager worked in happy unison.

The performance itself was like the adumbration of

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a new era in art. As long as the play was kept on, it was a sacred kind of terror to all listeners, and a source of scandal to all those who bring to art only the dulled, dimmed eyes with which they are wont to regard life.

Macbeth is not a long play, and portions of the witches' scenes had been wisely cut. Hence the *tempo* of the acting could be in accord with that trembling hesitation of even's which seem to rise into the field of consciousness like dreams. Every being who played his part upon this scene was, as it were, shaken by a secret terror: every word was like the ring of fate, cast with soft sound into the golden balance. It was all done significantly, with infinite care and suggestive power.

The night scenes were like the tallow-dip by the castle gate. The light flickered fearfully; now it glowed red, now it turned blue in the wind, which hissed and moaned through the ancient walls. One didn't know, at any given moment, whether Macbeth sighed or the night wind complained in the chimney. Everything was suppressed to the level of one soul—the dark stones of the castle, night, terror, the draught which the wind without drove through the crevices in the walls, and the grim suffering of the deeds within.

"'Twas a rough night."

And when Macbeth stretched out his bloody hands and moaned:

"This is a sorry sight,"

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all hearts moaned with him and participated in the terror of his deed, for, indeed, no less than he could they have resisted this Lady Macbeth, who flattered her hero like a great, beautiful cat. Even in reproach her voice was vibrant with love, and she seemed afraid of the harshness of her own words.

Whispering, breathing upon him, maddening him by the magic of her person—thus she fought for and with him. They embraced so often that in the intimate interchange of speech they seemed a single being with two souls. She implored, she flattered, she sang, almost, the suggestion of those horrors, and the ecstatic desire, the glowing hope softened the bloody awe of her words. She was more like a spoiled and willful child who, in ignorant petulance, insists upon evil, than like a heartless criminal.

Lovingly, caressingly, like a sister cooling a brother's fevered brow, thus she tried to dispel, to laugh softly away his horror at the apparition of Banquo's ghost. Even the words, "Fy, for shame!" came from her gently and reproachfully.

But what, finally, was one to say of the scene in which all the brokenness and the agony of her heart expresses itself in her somnambulistic state? She came on the stage like a frightened child, barefoot, and clad in a night-shift—a tortured, wretched, confused child, whom the will to evil had maddened, but who was weak and sorrowful.

There's a cruel folk-tale of a child sent to buy bread. But the farthing rolled from the tiny sin-

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ner's hands straight into a crack of the flooring. A hot fever took the poor little creature off, and now, in the moonlight, you may see the child in its little shroud tear and scratch the floor and seek and wail: "Ah, the farthing, the farthing!"

And what, in eternity, is Duncan's kingly crown? And what the lost farthing? And which misdeed was the heavier?

And she was this agonized baby: she wailed in lovely, pitiful tones, and, like the song of the wind, her voice vibrated through the house.

"Yet here's a spot!" And then she sobbed out brokenly, bitterly. "Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood!" And a heartrending lamentation accompanied the words: "The thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now?" And her "Oh, oh, oh," a little farther on, moaned and broke like the wailing of a dying fire in a draughty chimney. The audience shivered and experienced all the exceeding piteousness of the sight. She looked so forlorn, so utterly helpless in her straight little shift that fell, foldless, from her throat to her ankles. . . .

If Eppelin had been able to express as passionately the redemptory function of doom and death at the end of the play, as she had expressed the heartrending tone of its ineffable woe, the performance (in spite of the mediocrity of the support) would have been a truly great one. He, however, didn't quite achieve his own intention. He did achieve this much:

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that toward the end of the play all men felt death to be a wave of the free winds of the eternal heavens, a consoler and redeemer who came to break the ban of those evil dreams which here were life. The few hearts who were ripe for this artistic revelation left the theater exalted, touching eternity, reaching beyond time. Even the many hundred ciphers felt a stirring in their rudimentary souls. . . .

The news next day whirled in the streets and in the *cafés*. The fact was fought over and discussed: the actors had been bold enough to render those historic criminals humanly, to infuse souls into those tigerish beings, to temper terror with pity!

The moralists raised their warning shrieks, and even the press contented itself with acknowledging that the performance had been bold, thoughtful, and deeply moving. It begged to submit, though, that Shakespeare was somebody, too.

Wigram consoled Elisabeth, who was half-desperate, half intoxicated, with her own achievement.

"The great classics," he said, "would die soon after their own age, if every age did not infuse into them its classical spirit. How long had Homer been truly dead because a school of rhetors encrusted his warm, sweet, lovely life!"

Elisabeth, in truth, had become the sensation of the hour. All those who consider death a deep wrong done them rather than a deliverance and a redemption—all those did not speak of the agony of Lady Macbeth, but of Elisabeth Koett. They, whom the

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austere nobility of suffering had never touched, cared nothing for that sorrow, for those sighs. Elisabeth Koett in a mere night-shift!—here was their sensation. Had it been pretty steep? How had she looked? Had she had on a corset underneath, or tights? Was she thin or stout? How about her arms? How was her hair dressed? Had the stage been well-lit? Did she walk rapidly? No?—That was a pity! Wouldn't the censor put an end to such scandal? And the Koett, of all people! Ah, well, deep waters. . . .

Macbeth had to be repeated six times. The first time the house quivered with terror and with the presentiment of approaching fate: the other times with sensationalism. And ninety per cent. of the audience went away disappointed. If this was the whole show! Why, it wasn't really bold.

All the young bloods of the town ran to the theater and fell in love with Elisabeth by the dozen. Of each dozen one fell in love with her lamenting soul, with the ineffable sweetness of her art: the other eleven with—her night-shift. . . .

VIII

Now life began!

Flowers came and letters and invitations. The embarrassed congratulations of her colleagues of the other sex, the respect of the manager, the avoidance and secret grimness of her fellow-actresses—all these things showed Elisabeth that she was somebody now.

Eppelin played Macbeth nightly with more sorrowful passion, with more humanity, with more of somber piteousness. And when he took Lady Macbeth into his arms he ventured a shy pressure. She knew well that this pressure was not part of his acting, and the sensation ran like pearly drops down her skin. She was fond of him in a way, but she could not look up to him as heretofore. She knew herself superior to him, and that sense of eagle-like superiority gave her an intimate ecstasy. She wrought upon him with her magic until he fell into that sort of fever in which the gifted soul emits inspiration as an electric wire emits sparks.

Thus these two held their art in the joy of a mighty interplay and equilibrium. They compelled all hearts. But finally Elisabeth tore herself loose and emerged in lonely greatness and power.

And when the fifteen hundred people at her feet were enthusiastic, nay, jubilant, her heart laughed

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within her and she bit her lips in the piercing sweetness of the sense of seeing everyone intoxicated, consecrated, maddened! She played Eppelin into a flame of all the senses, she whirled young Hiller, whom she liked well, into a state of headless passion, she turned the brains of the most worthless and the most worthy men, and pierced all women with a raging desire to imitate the resistless glory of her magic.

The young men sent her flowers, good and bad verses, offers of marriage, assurances of love, threats of death, notices of suicide. Her heart quivered with a grim delight. It was all grist to her mill: it was all delightful. Eppelin begged for her love.

"Wait till you're madder still about me," she laughed.

Now her full beauty unfolded, and old Gundenau radiated pride. He trebled her allowance. She didn't want to accept his kindness, saying:

"I can give you nothing in return."

"What!" cried the old gentleman. "And my joy in seeing you develop so, and my pride, isn't that anything? And how about my jealousy?"

She laughed.

"Yes," he assured her. "You see, I must give you a large allowance, otherwise you'd be forced to take money from others. Pretty soon you'll have to take modern parts—to every part half a dozen gowns. D'you want to earn that in the—usual way?"

"Not unless I loved the giver."

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"Exactly, Elisabeth," the old gentleman said. "We can speak freely, and I want you to promise me one thing——"

"Dearest friend," she interrupted him, "I'll take no lovers that I don't truly love. Was that it?"

"Yes." He looked sadly at his withered, bony, old hands. "And when you've found one whom you love most dearly, tell him the queer fact that old Gundenau gave you your first start without so much as a *pour-boire*, and drink the health of the old fellow who got nothing——"

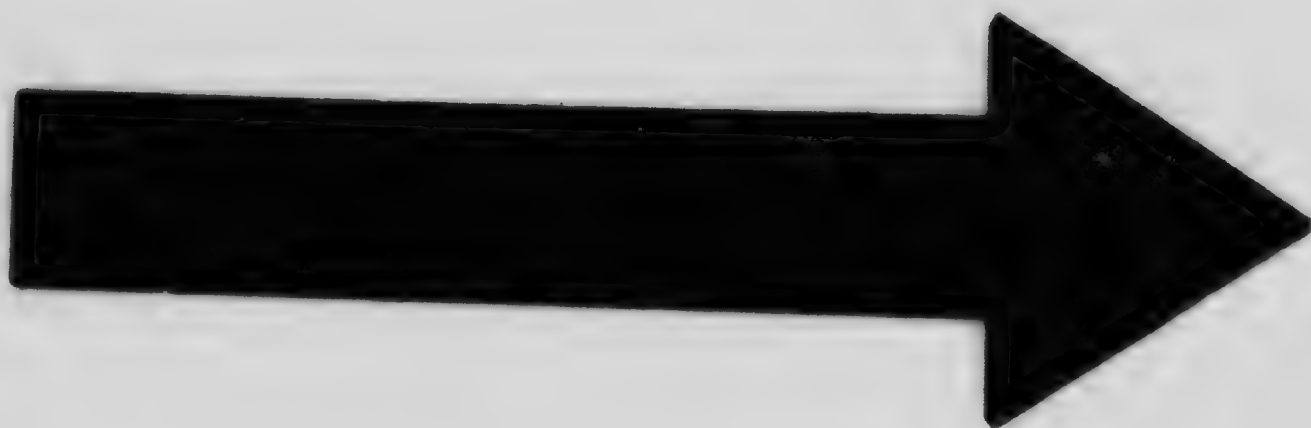
"But a kiss," she laughed, put her arms about the old gentleman, and kissed him heartily on both cheeks. "I give you my promise."

She rushed off.

But the old gentleman was restless as a brook in spate.

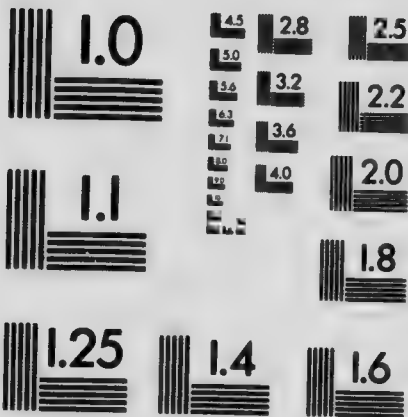
He laughed and cried and would have given all his Ionian coins for one little sip of the elixir of youth. Now he was in love with her, too, to the best of his ability.

Elisabeth had a *diable au corps*. She changed completely. A young woman whose acquaintance she had made, and who was beautiful enough not to be jealous, had introduced to her a Viennese dressmaker. The latter came especially to Graz to study Elisabeth's face, figure, gait, and coloring. The consequence was that, henceforth, Elisabeth was gowned with a noble and yet subtle simplicity, with a suggestion of purity and austere grace. She looked



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with positive respect at her own image in the mirror.

But she was still self-distrustful at this period, and went to rehearsal in one of the new gowns not without perturbation. But the admiring exclamations, evidently sincere, of her acquaintances, reassured her. Hiller waited for her at the stage entrance, and was beside himself with delight. Not until now had she seemed complete to him. She observed it in his whole bearing, which was full of a new reverence and chivalry.

He begged her to change her dwelling. She couldn't possibly stay in that mean suburb. He asked whether he might venture to furnish an apartment for her. She gave him her hand and smiled:

"That's nice of you."

She gave him no other thanks, and yet he felt as though *he* had received a favor.

At the next rehearsal biting comment was not lacking. A fellow-actress, who was obliged to take elderly parts, asked whether such costumes could be bought out of Miss Koett's slender salary.

"No," said Elisabeth and smiled, "my lover pays for them: tell yours to go and do likewise."

"I haven't any!" the lady screamed righteously. "Don't you know that I've been married for years?"

"Ah," said Elisabeth, "that was prudent in you."

She didn't associate with any of her colleagues to whom acting was either a mere business or a mere profession. She sedulously avoided anyone in whom

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it was apparent that he played to earn his salary and was careless of the poets who were to be interpreted on the stage. If, in consequence, evil speaking came to her ears, she had her gift of incisive repartee.

There was one woman at the theater who had, until now, played the parts of great ladies or great *demi-mondaines*. From this actress Elisabeth appropriated whatever parts seemed to her desirable. Parts that others had spoiled and dehumanized—these were the ones that she especially affected. With nervous passion she threw herself into such studies, let her imaginative insight reconstruct the previous life and the soul-history of a given character, and then she played the part with piteousness, sweetness, and exquisite charm. She wanted now to please, to charm, to allure. If she didn't get a part that gave her such scope, there was a crisis. The galleries howled, Elisabeth made melancholy farewell bows, and—next day she had the desired part. If need were, she was prepared to break her contract. When the whole city was at her feet, she heard an inner voice: "Oh, dear little town! And yet I must go farther, climb higher!"

Eppelin felt his whole nature changed with passion for this moody girl, who would now and then let him kiss her once and then say: "Good-by, I have to hurry off now." He suffered terribly, and when, on the stage, he had to play the part of her lover, all hearers were in a state of feverish delight, for it was known how she let him thirst and squirm. . . .

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It was not long before she had young Hiller where she had Eppelin. He implored in vain. He wasn't even permitted to kiss her mouth. She gave him only her hands, and he had hours of joy and of heart-rending misery. He kissed her beautiful, nervous, twilight-pale hands madly. He turned them in and out, kissed her wrist, sought resting-places for his lips between her fingers, pressed his cheeks and forehead against them, and avidly inhaled their subtle fragrance. . . . She sat or lay still, gave him now one hand, now the other, felt his bitter passion run through her, and dreamed, dreamed, wondering whom she would, some day, love!

He implored her to marry him. "No," she said, "I might be faithless to you. I like to feel such madness as yours. And then, there's my career. I must rise higher, higher!"

"What am I to do?" he complained. "You see how this mad passion is corroding my whole life! I must have you. What do you want?"

She sat up, suddenly serious.

"I'll give you a promise. On the day that you get me a first-rate engagement on a metropolitan stage, on that day I will kiss you all you please . . ."

"How in the world am I to manage that? I suppose that nothing less than the *Burgtheater* would do?"

"Not necessarily. But the public in question must be cultivated, influential, and rich, and I must hold the first place."

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From that day on the half-maddened boy made weekly trips to Vienna, sought society of various kinds, made the acquaintance of the thousand and one parasites—all having their price—of the metropolitan stage. He observed that it was not the public taste of the great city that dragged down the repertory of its stage. It was the disgraceful competition of theater with theater that caused the exploiting of ever lower and lower instincts across the footlights, in order to drag the much-desired masses to the box office. And he also discovered that one could make the sparks of success fly upward easily enough if the fuel used was paper—money.

He succeeded in engaging the interest of agents and managers. Thus it happened that one and another manager came to Graz and watched Elisabeth's playing and its magical effect and drawing capacity. Immediately a competition for her services began, and she ended by accepting an offer that seemed to her most favorable.

Hiller quietly paid the fine which she incurred for breaking her contract in Graz, and shyly, trembling in every limb, brought her at the season's end, her liberation, black on white.

"What a fool I am," he said sadly. "I'm helping you to separate yourself from me forever. Unless, indeed, you permit me to follow you to Vienna."

Elisabeth was anxious and serious. She had sold herself, not for money, but for ambition. And now remorse hammered in all her veins.

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The young man did not dare to approach her: she did not move.

"Elisabeth," he said gently.

She looked down. There was a long and terrible silence between these two, who were ashamed of their ugly compact which neither felt free to break. At last Elisabeth pulled herself together.

"I'll suggest a plan," she said to him, who was now her master. "The vacation is coming. Let's go on a long and beautiful journey. Let us go to Paris, and you must teach me French. It is said that one easily learns to love one's teacher. Don't think that I'm not fond of you now. Only differently, only. . . . Let's think of nothing yet but our lovely trip. . . ."

Her lips trembled, and about her mouth quivered a childlike helplessness, that same helplessness with which she had played Lady Macbeth and which had made of her the fool of her own glowing desires.

"Of our trip," she went on, "to some country where people have less—conscience—than here."

And she cried like a girl whom pirates have sold into slavery.

But upon this day Hiller was tender and brotherly, and comforted her as best he could. It was his good fortune that he was so, and did not frighten her. . . .

Then they went off on their trip, and Elisabeth Koett was the mistress of a wealthy young man, quite

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in accord with the methods of other poor young girls who enter the dramatic art—the earthiest and most physical of all the arts, but the only one in which a woman may rise to the height of genius.

IX

AND so this lovely woman had fallen a prey to a provincial leader of fashion and of opinion, who, according to the use of such persons, journeyed thrice a year to Vienna to gain a knowledge of the season's regnant fads and fancies. Meanwhile the three young men whom Elisabeth had left behind her were fulfilled of grief and rage, and had to fight for their very souls. Eppelin worked, read, and developed himself in his clever way, and only the red-rimmed lids of his cool, gray eyes betrayed the fact that he used the nights for study rather than watch through their endless hours over the cruelty of his grief.

Rasmus went to Vienna and introduced himself to young Ziebern. The latter was a scion of one of the oldest families of the Austrian nobility. He was tall, a little bent, slender, well-bred, good-looking, of melancholy temper, and so mild and weak that he could not even escape the curse of lasting boredom. He seemed to have a perpetual cold; his nose and lips were soft and full, and looked as though they were slightly swollen. His voice was of feminine gentleness.

The Zieberns had, for centuries, given good soldiers to the State; first cavalry men strong with their lances, then admirable adjutants and generals, and,

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at last, diplomats. Thus they had passed from the sword, as it were, to the fineness of the needle, and the race was tired, tired.

Severin von Ziebern gave a rest-cure to the nerves of all his ancestors. Not that he was without abilities. He rode and fenced tolerably, played the piano tolerably, conversed tolerably, was on fair terms with all men, represented the dignity of his family passably, and would have made a fair enough figure in life itself if others hadn't been stronger. But these others tempted him and he took to sports and to gambling. Three or four times he had come, in a confused state of mind, to his father, to rid him of rather high debts. Hence the old gentleman was on the look-out for a companion, secretary, friend; in short, for someone who could exert a bit of influence in the direction of a truer and more serious life.

Gundenau told him one day of the companionable Rasmus who, on demand, could be a thorough man of the world. The suggestion was taken up. Rasmus demanded unlimited credit at a tailor's, and a fair salary. He was first engaged on trial in the capacity of courier for the Summer months. When, at the beginning of the Winter, he made a motion to leave, two great tears came into the handsome, gentle, brown eyes of Severin.

"Oh, how bored I'd be without you this season! Can you treat me so badly just as I've become used to you?"

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And so the entertaining Theodore remained.

Rasmus was of the opinion that anyone whose spiritual equilibrium is imperfect should have some aim upon which to fix the otherwise vague yearning of his soul, even though that aim be unattainable. Hence he inoculated the empty heart of the Count Severin with his own yearning for Elisabeth Koett. That proved pleasant and useful at once. He could speak of the thing which filled his own heart, he could tell wonderful tales of this alluring woman, he could lie to his heart's content, and Ziebern wasn't bored, because the talk was all—of a woman. Rasmus painted Elisabeth to him in the colors of his own great yearning. He spoke of her golden-brown hair curling over her brow and nape like the fine bronze wires of an antique instrument, of her slender erect figure, of her seriousness, of her sweet silence—like the aroma of unspoken dreams—dreams that communicated themselves to the beholder and were broken by no empty babbling. Just she, this was the wonderful thing, whose soul was full of significant depths, *she* loved silence. And then he told how this simple girl had one fine day put on the most exquisite garb and had become in all her walk and conversation a great lady.

"I ought to ask you to stop," said Ziebern, "for I like too well to hear of her, and I am beginning to fall in love with her. Tell me, though, what you know of her more intimate life."

Then Rasmus told him of the passion of many men

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that had floated about Elisabeth, how now she would stimulate it, and now turn it to despair. He told of her wonderful acting of Lady Macbeth, of Eppelin's misery, and Hiller's wooing, and, since he had represented her as so pure a woman, he dared not confess that his flowers had been futile and Hiller's wealth victorious. Hence he said:

"Finally, but most unwillingly, she gave Hiller a promise of marriage. But she does not love him. He knows it; I know it; she has said so herself."

Then Severin said with a shy remnant of the spirit of his ancestral robber-barons:

"One ought to take her away from him!"

"It's possible," Rasmus assured him, "for she's coming to Vienna."

"To which theater?" cried Ziebern. "Do get us a box for the season, and one near the stage."

From now on they both dreamed passionately how Elisabeth was to be conquered. Ziebern bought her picture and, like the traditional prince in the fairy-tale, fell violently in love with it. Rasmus wrote an account of all these doings to Elisabeth, and his letters were exquisitely entertaining to her. . . .

Only Wigram suffered without relief and beyond measure.

Hitherto, in the fullness of his work, he had hardly been conscious of woman as an active factor in life. His friendship he had given only where he had been met by the highest intelligence. He had loved beauty with a breathless wonder, but he had not desired it.

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No other lovely woman, however, had ever sat so near him in the magic twilight as Elisabeth had done that one immortal evening; he had never before felt the throbbing of a woman's heart, the trembling of her arm, the fragrance of her hair.

Now he would gladly have given his life for one hour in which to cover with his kisses her nervous, exquisite hands, as her lover had so often done, before he had ensnared all the glory of her body in the net of her own ambition.

Work! work! He cried these words to himself in vain. In his fevered restlessness all books seemed long and tedious. Hence he would take up his paper in the morning and let his mind bite into politics, or the corruption of society, or the records of the courts, and he thought of how all this ugliness had had to arise. Had to—so much he felt sure of. Even crime was necessitated. Man is like a floating leaf: wind and wave are his circumstances. Was there a way out of this reasoning?

He thought of slaying Elisabeth. . . . Would that be necessitated, too?

His days were like soured wine—strong but useless, turbid and intolerably disgustful. And now she was going to Vienna? And then? And then. . . .?

He thought of some way out of the spiritual tangle of his life. "You love her," he said to himself, "and that is your fate. There's no escape. But you desire to learn and think and write a great work. Very well. Study her, seek the hidden wellsprings of her

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life. Make her spirit's flame, her ambition, her erring walk the subjects of your contemplation, and she will be more truly yours than theirs who hold her flexible body in their arms, and think that they possess her wholly. Follow her life and learn to read the expression in the face of her fate."

His heart became lighter. He wrote to Rasmus, asking whether that friend could procure him a small position in Vienna, one that might pay but little; only it must leave plenty of leisure.

As it happened, Rasmus found him such an opening as he desired. It was the librarianship of a workingmen's library. It paid little—only ninety crowns a month—but it was meant to employ only the Sundays and the evenings of its incumbent. Wigram accepted the place joyfully and went to Vienna.

There he discovered at once, during the Summer vacation, that Rasmus was living two lives. In one of these lives he bore the stamp of the finished gentleman, and bore himself with the utter conventionality which society demands. He differed from other men only in being known as a charmingly fantastic *raconteur*. At present, however, he took a short vacation from all that, since Severin was in his father's keeping in a world-forgotten country-seat, where he could take no harm. And so Rasmus had a chance to recover from all the galling proprieties. He wore soft shirts and collars and a cap. He carried a Spanish cane, and was to be seen in the most distant Bo-

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hemias of Vienna, associating with young fellows who still vacillated between the art school and life.

In the first days of his stay at Vienna Wigram, still without a lodging, was distraught and irritable. Hence, when he was not looking for quarters, Rasmus persuaded him to visit a studio which five young friends of his had, at great sacrifice, rented in a suburb. The rent of fifteen crowns was distributed among the five. Of furnishings they hadn't much beyond an iron stove and five easels. The place was as bare as a Japanese tea-house. They had a lamp, in addition, a guitar, and a few old rugs. They conversed and dined, reclining on the floor, like the gods of Greece. They were forced finally, however, to buy a couch—second-hand, of course—since the models who came in were unfortunately exacting.

Wigram was rather timid about making the sudden acquaintance of these five disciples of art. But Rasmus told him that four of them were in the country. One of them, however, loved the hot summer of the city, that breeder of glowing thoughts. "So he sits in the studio," Rasmus laughed, "tortured by his ideas, and hurls them upon canvas so that the very paint squirts."

"Aha!" said Wigram, "I wouldn't mind seeing him."

They entered. A pale young man with a huge shock of reddish blond hair came to meet them. His eyes seemed asurge with spiritual oceans. He was a kind of astral being, and led them up to an easel

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on which stood the beginning of a great Crucifixion, painted with that cruel insistence upon harrowing detail which those use upon whom life has stamped its iron heel.

One of the three crucified ones had already been colored. He looked like a subject just fetched from an anatomical laboratory, but one who had died of hunger previous to dissection. Arms as thin as spears seemed to pierce the deadly clouds above, the storm tore at the tattered rags scarce covering the wolfish leanness of the loins; the head was raised high with an expression of infinitely sordid agony, but the chin fell, and the white teeth gleamed through the picture's gloom. The drawing of the thin and tortured body was magnificent, but the ugliness of death was dragged from the subject with incomparable ruthlessness.

"Ah," said Wigram, deeply moved. "I call this a complete representation of that death which is enduring—the compelling murderer of mankind."

"It is not death," said the ghostly voice of the pitiless artist behind him, "it is the Saviour."

But because the talent displayed here was in truth wonderful, and because only the hatred and the bitterness of poverty and oppression had wreaked upon this picture the angry misery of its image of the world—because these things were so, Wigram set about discussing the matter with the young artist.

Feebler and more feeble became the arguments and imprecations of the unfortunate youth, mightier and

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more sonorous the voice of Wigram, who proclaimed and preached—while the bronze floods of sunset streamed through a western window—the gospel of the eternal artist—Love!

“He who contemplates the appearances of the universe with loving insight, can no longer create the frightful or shocking. Do you, for instance, hate any human being? Very well. Then discover how that human being came to be and grew up. Consider how life deceived him, how he deceives himself, and how he is the mere marionette of the circumstances of the world! And then he will seem no more worthy of your hate than a scarecrow in the fields, which angers the raven, but which the passer-by considers a merry addition to the landscape. And, finally, if your insight into these matters is complete, you will regard that human being whom you have hated not only with understanding, but with sympathy.”

The young painter and Rasmus were both silent. Wigram considered the inner meaning of his own speech, and the deep light of the departing sun made three divine images of them.

“However,” Wigram added at last, “if in the place of your indignation you can’t put an equal glow of love—why, work with your indignation. I’m afraid I don’t get beyond that often, either.”

The three arose in order to take a stroll in the street. When they got there, Rasmus began:

“I know how he could be converted to a love of

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the happy, the healthy, the rich, and the beautiful. It is the love of woman that could teach him."

Wigram winced, for he felt himself reminded of one whom his heart would gladly have forgotten. Nevertheless, he began to persuade the young artist that the subject was one not unworthy of his thought. And he was soon deep in one of his favorite theses: namely, that in our day, a new human kind had arisen in the shape of woman: a human being with two aspects. From one point of view still ready to play the old, teasing game at love, but, on the other hand, often serious, strong, aglow, open-hearted, and happy in achievement; filled with a yearning sorrow over man, eternally seeking, loving, disappointed.

And here, too, the seed fell upon good ground.

Once before had Cyrus Wigram stirred in Elisabeth Koett the ambition to depict these erring children of an old romance, who wear upon their bodies all the insignia of an age of competition: the mannish collar, hat, shoes, coat; who tread the ground firmly, and have forgotten the dallying little hands of their mothers, but in whose hearts still ring the chimes of immemorial dreams, and of the old, unforgettable, impossible desires.

Now, in this young painter, too, welled up the desire to depict the beautiful women of our two-souled time, this time full of wealth and arrogance, whose mirror their proud figures are, this time of futile yearning after the goods of the spirit, of yearning after the man ready to lose his life in order to

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gain it, this time with the unappeased woe in its eyes; this time whose ears are listening for the lost chimes of a sabbath of the soul—these days of strife and peacelessness and woe.

But what a picture was that which the streets presented! The Summer still brooded upon them, and only since the sun had flared out in the deep rose of sunset, had the odors of traffic, dust, and asphalt faded from the air. From the open doors of the inns came the fragrance of fresh food, the beer foamed within, and even though everyone seemed out of doors, while these three passed from the oppressiveness of the day into the blessedness of evening, yet was there no noise or turmoil upon the streets. No one pushed or pressed against another. There was peace in the glow of the dying day, the peace of evening.

"How beautiful is the great city in Summer," Rasmus said to his friends. "It is almost as if the heavy air restored to men their lost equilibrium. At ninety degrees the greedy city turns into the castle of the Sleeping Beauty. We pass a baker adream in his doorway, the clerks of the great shop under tease each other in the happiness of their daily liberation. You look about you and declare suddenly: here are the good old times."

Wigram, who rarely smiled, looked with an unaccustomed cheerfulness up and down the street.

"What you say is true, Rasmus. All those restless ones, those earners of money, those maws of

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greed, are gone now. The Fools of Life continue, at the lakes, to play their endless comedy. They do not hear the murmuring of the waves, but deafen it with the noise of their festivities. That furious haste which drove them from the city has gone with them, and only those people have remained who for all their business live quietly and thoughtfully. And so, as in the good old times, business and trade and traffic pursue a quiet course. And everyone is happy. And the yearning after the refreshing coolth of unseen woodlands is better and blessedder than their joy whose realization of all wishes includes boating and tennis and all frivolities. I'm glad to be able to walk here."

"Look at the evening sky," said the young artist.

They had come to the *Elisabeth Bridge*, and the blood of the wounded sky drenched all the western heavens. It was the mighty sunset of the great city—a burnished, reddish gold streaming across the firmament. Below this glow was a yellow edge melting, in the zenith, into a tender green. If you turned your back to the sunset you saw a sky of soft lavender, but the houses under it were tipped with gold as though crowned, and in their windows great jewels burned to death. Toward the sunset, however, no house could be distinguished from another. They blended into a mighty, purple wall, only the towers pointing upward into the golden fires. There was about them a simplicity of form and tint, something that melted all these giant shapes together into a

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single mass—mighty and ruthless as the life of our age.

And of this life, which is given us without our will, so cruel, complex, and unconquerable, but which we are to recreate and to fill with music and with reconciliation—of this life these three friends spoke, wandering through the streets in which only a rare vehicle rattled, and which were so empty that the great, red cars of the tramway hardly sounded their brazen gongs.

From windows blinded with the heavens' glory the palaces of the mighty, locked and screened, stared upon these glowing souls who nodded at them not without love.

X

ELISABETH was in Paris, that happy city which the neighborhood of a great, cool, flowing river keeps hospitably beautiful even in Summer. She belonged to her lover, but in an absent-minded kind of way. Her heart, her eyes, sought near and far, but always outwardly. Of her own soul she was afraid.

She learned many things. She learned to imitate the wavelike, gurgling laughter of the Frenchwomen, their swift, light walk, the sudden, perplexed halting and scarce perceptible glance. She learned the proper way of sitting down in the restaurants and *cafés*, the art of talking charmingly of nothing, of lightly carrying parasol and train, and keeping lace and linen in a state of cloudlike purity. She learned the strange art of seeming a trifle intoxicated without having taken anything, and of keeping perfectly sober even when the champagne flowed freely. She acquired the proper method of sitting in carriage or auto, of all the social and daily subtleties of human contact. Above all, she knew how to adapt, with exquisite appropriateness, the form and color of her garb to the peculiar exigencies of her beauty.

When she returned home she was irritated by the people of the little town, who knew neither the art

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of urban life nor of rural repose, and she desired intensely the larger and more vital atmosphere of Vienna.

Hiller started out with her in a small car. His mood was elegiac.

"Why didn't you take the great touring-car?" she asked. "Why this slow little car. I'm in a hurry. I need to hear the rushing of the streams of life!"

"Be content with this little car," he plead, "it keeps us close together—like a bridal couple. Let my farewell be at least a bit of an idyll. For I suppose I'll get my *congé* now?"

"Not at all, dear friend," she said; "we are at a point where satiety is impossible. I was once in love with you, and I feel to-day just as when you used to kiss my hands for hours. I like you, and I'll let you love me still. *En revanche*, you fulfill all my wishes. As often as you come to Vienna, you may come to me. But you mustn't take up your permanent dwelling in the city, where I must be free to grow. That would lead to a frightful rupture. And now, get up speed, speed!"

They flitted by the valley of the Mur and of the Murz. The mountains opened their arms to receive them, but held nothing in their empty clasp. They towered above the road, but they could not hold this woman, who was fleeing from her home. Elisabeth's eyes sought the distance beyond the fir-forests.

"In what direction does Vienna lie?" He showed

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her, and she sighed. "Ah, this criss-crossing of the roads!"

As they were climbing a long inclined plain that leads to the Semmering Pass, the water in the motor cooler became so hot that the car had to stop a long time. Hiller sought a brook and carefully refilled the tank. But still the machine worked imperfectly, and Elisabeth's impatience filled him with rancor against the car. But thus, at least, the woe of parting was alleviated for him. On the rest of the way to Vienna he considered with himself what make of car to buy next, and weighed against each other the advantages of the different makes. Elisabeth was almost forgotten.

In Vienna he installed her in a pleasant apartment which he had long held in readiness for her, rented space in a nearby garage for the handsome little car which he presented to Elisabeth, and prepaid six months' rent. Then he lost himself in the life of the city, obeying the urgency of his new mood. . . .

Elisabeth was quite alone. She didn't, at any time, easily make friends with her colleagues, and so she had many bitter hours, for she had ceased to be accustomed to loneliness. The manager's reception was cool. After her own engagement he had taken on a magnificent, brilliantly blond person, whose repertory coincided to some extent with Elisabeth's. Moreover, the woman in question was well known in the world of fashionable men, and weighed thirty pounds more than the slender Elisabeth. Now he simply wanted

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to find out which of the two would render the other superfluous.

Of her fellow actors there was but one who interested her at all. He had been attached to the same theater as long as anyone could remember. He had gray hair, very red cheeks, was a giant in size and vocal power, and his name was Horst Wullenweber. He was an actor of the old, dashing school, who didn't consider a part carefully or think it out closely. Unfortunately, he didn't even learn it very well. He was inordinately proud of his voice, which sounded like a great gong, and vibrated throughout the largest auditorium. He told the beautiful silent woman, whom he liked at once, his whole history, and how he had come into possession of his voice.

"Even when I was a boy," he told her, "I liked to raise my voice. I liked to roar as long as there was breath in my body. That's the reason I loved the country and the mountains. They gave me space, and I didn't annoy anybody."

Any part that was assigned to him he at once searched through for its possibilities in regard to the expenditure of vocal energy. If it gave him a chance to roar it was a good part, and made him proud and happy.

He helped Elisabeth over the helplessness of her first weeks in the great city. He took her to the *Prater*, and persuaded her to drink one glass of foaming Pilsener after another, until she grew gently cheerful and began to flirt mildly with the people in

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the garden. He himself seemed to have a hot stone in his inner economy. He poured beer on it till it seemed to hiss. The steins followed each other ineffectually.

He drank mightily, monstrosly, and then in the evening took her home with an uncertain sailor's gait. "The scenery," he roared, "is truly rural! Aha! I can still say it. That means another pint at the *Rathskeller*."

And he thundered away down the silent street.

Next afternoon he turned up again and praised the nature, size, and quality of his *katsenjammer* in a voice like the roaring of mighty storm-bells.

"Ho!" he cried, "that was a jag—notable, primal, ichthyosaurian! My skull felt like the great kettle-drum at the opera during a Meyerbeer orgy. But I have conquered, I and a gallon of water and a *goulasch* with eighty per cent. paprika, so that the sweat broke out from all my pores!"

"And now I feel well," he would add. "Where do we souse to-day?"

Elisabeth would laugh heartily. The old fellow seemed to refresh her. He had light-gray eyes with vivid gleams in them, a thick neck, red as a lobster, and thick, red ears, such as are rarely seen in men of his age.

"Heavens!" she said, "if there were a play in which we two could coöperate—that would be delightful."

"There is one," he trumpeted. "*The Count of*

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Urschaneck, or The Sinful Nun! The nun, you understand, comes to the Count in the form of an insatiable ghost by way of a subterranean passage, and they have a magnificent night-affair. But she is caught and immured alive. He discovers it all, and beats down the wall with his mailed fist. Grand, I tell you, grand! Why, when I played that in the year sixty-three the bricks just flew about in the auditorium, and the people fled, wildly applauding, to the exits. But this weak-kneed generation has thrown the old chivalrous plays on the dung-hill. Nothing like that now. . . ."

His last words were melancholy.

Elisabeth laughed again.

"Never mind. Some day we'll play Goethe's *Goetz!*" she said, and was happy to have found a human being who seemed to act as the proper background to her own nerves. He himself simply hadn't any.

"I'll take the part of Adelheit," she went on, "and you that of the Knight with the Iron Hand."

"Agreed!" he cried merrily. "Why, we've got to put on some classic piece every Thursday, anyhow. I'll get busy with the manager at once. He's got to let you do Adelheit."

He didn't come back out of sheer embarrassment. For the manager had given all the great and grateful parts of the immediate future to the beautiful Helen Kalmen, with her mighty, white shoulders. Thus Elisabeth Koett had leisure enough. The manager

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was saving her for the great women of old-fashioned tragedy. It was a matter of distinct discomfort to him that it was thought the duty of every distinguished manager to put on occasionally unknown pieces by the great masters. He had chosen Ibsen's *Expedition to the North*, and Elisabeth was to do what she could with the part of Hjordis. He was still very skeptical as to her power over the nerves of an audience. After all, she was a provincial.

And so the lonely actress made up her mind to visit Wigram, of whose move to Vienna she had heard with mixed feelings. Still, curiosity tricked her. Did he do it for her sake?

In the neighborhood of Schönbrunn, in the top floor of a tall house, Wigram had rented a cheap little room. The house stood in an inaccessible quarter, swarming with poor people. Few wanted to climb to the fourth floor, and, moreover, his window gave on the West, the windy side of the city. But all these circumstances really ministered to Wigram's content. He looked out across the tiles, which absorbed all light and rested the eye with their grayish red, straight to the green trees of Schönbrunn. On the roofs, the grave and graceful cats took their constitutional; in the courtyards fluttered the merrily colored clothes; wide open over him curved the sky. Here he could watch the multiform movement of the heavens in rain and sun and storm. The clouds of the mountains were his; the storm-winds blew, like the trumpets of the Day of Doom, through all his

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window-cracks. When the wind howled and moaned and whined, his landlady would say: "The poor souls are crying."

He had been in luck when he found this woman. She saw that he was poor, and took care of him in many ways. She was a tall, humorous person. Her husband was a railroad hand with a thirst. But she was stronger than he, so that she managed to secure from him, in vigorous but merrily recurrent battle, three-fourths of his weekly wage. The remaining fourth he left on Saturday night in the tap-room. Hence Frau Polle's Sunday excursions were made at the window, with eyes and dreams. Now Wigram also spent a good deal of his time at the window, and so, across the narrow court, these two made friends with each other. He told her of the colors, struggles, fates of cloud and wind, and she mended holes in his philosophically ancient shirts.

Elisabeth was a bit malicious. Hiller had taught her how to manage a motor-car, and so, defiant and in grand style, she now rode to Wigram with the intention of taking the poor fellow for a ride in the car of her prosperity. She left the car at the door in care of the janitor, who, full of respectful astonishment, gave her the number of Wigram's room. She climbed up, knocked, and stepped into her bitter old friend's little cave of the winds.

Wigram had recognized her step and knock, and the thought, *It is Elisabeth!* shivered through him. But when she rustled in, all silk and feathers, some-

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thing in him grew cold, and he thought: "All the insignia of harlotry. But she's lovely for all that."

"You expect me to recognize you, Elisabeth?" he said. "You offer a sharp contrast to this place!"

She stood still, hesitating. She had come up in a victorious frame of mind, and had knocked wantonly. Now it came suddenly into her mind that, since she had seen him, she had burdened her soul with guilt, and had, as yet, made no atonement through her art. Wigram, on the other hand, had remained pure, as always. She thought, too, that her immediate situation was really anything but splendid. And so she spoke humbly enough:

"Be good, dear friend! I get bitter words enough from others, and these few rags and trinkets I buy at the price of many evil hours. If you can't say something dear and kind to me, at least tell me about yourself. May I sit down?"

"Yes," he said good-naturedly, "do sit down, Elisabeth." He pointed to the divan, and himself sat down in the window-seat.

"How do you get along here?" she asked.

"Well enough."

"Have you a good salary?"

"Ninety crowns a month."

"Cyrus!" she cried, "for the love of God!"

"Oh, it's a good deal," he hastened to assure her.

"I pay fifteen crowns a month for this little hole, five a month suffice for light and heat even in the coldest Winter. The little iron stove conquers these

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few square-yards thoroughly. Ten crowns a month go toward clothes, laundry, and books. So that leaves me a *gulden* a day for food."

"But a breakfast at an inn costs that much!"

"I don't go to an inn. Mornings and afternoons I have half a quart of milk with bread. At midday I cook beans with lard, or else my landlady fetches me sixty *heller* worth of beef with vegetables. That leaves a crown for night, when I have sausage and bread and butter and tea in plenty. One *gulden* a week I put aside for a Sunday excursion."

"And tobacco, of which you were so fond?"

"I've given up the habit."

"But, Cyrus, you always said that your best ideas rode on the blue clouds of smoke."

"I have a better mount for them now."

"And that is?"

"The wind, Elisabeth, the storm-wind, that crashes over these roofs, and makes me happy even in my sleep. In three days this very wind taught me to love Vienna."

Elisabeth told him that she hated the storm. It made the wearing of a handsome *coiffure*, of an elaborate hat, or a full garment all but impossible. It tore at everything.

"I love the wind more than a brother," said Wigram, full of enthusiasm. "When the wind doesn't blow, nature is silent, and God seems dead. He speaks in the storm. Then are the heavens full of motion and beauty, even when the cloud masses are

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very gray. I would not exchange any master's immortal music for the storms of the forest against this window, for the wailing in the chimney, the crashing on the roof, the roaring in aërial heights, the wonderful song of the trees yonder in Schönbrunn. The very thought of it all trickles like a living ecstasy through all my veins. That is the weather of my mood, Elisabeth, in which I seek the open. Last night I walked about the streets while the storm thundered and the bricks crashed. While all the other sleepy people lay in their beds, I saw the lights turn blue, and heard them hiss between life and death. I passed Schönbrunn, and there Satan seemed to be astride the wind; there was a crying and roaring and blaring like that of the Specter Huntsman's horn. And all that liberated my soul, for it showed me that the soul of the universe was like to mine—as stormily harmonious, as threatening, and as home-like, as happy in the consciousness of strife. I felt that I was God's child, Elisabeth, God's child!"

Elisabeth sat still, lost in thought and melancholy.

"You are happy, and your happiness costs the price of neither money nor honor, but rather increases your faith in yourself. Ah, Cyrus, and I am so spotted by the world!"

"You are not spotted if you are serving in a great cause."

"Ah," she sighed, "if I were serving in a great cause! But the greater my actual success, the smaller the—cause seems to become."

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"I know, I know," said Wigram, "that's because you didn't remain lonely . . ."

"Did you?"

"Not wholly," Wigram smiled. "But in your sense, yes! What I do is to remain within hearing distance of the immature, the aspirers, the learners. Do you hear those light leaps on the stairs? There comes one of my young friends, three steps at a time. I wonder if he'll conquer life in the same tempo."

The young painter to whom Rasmus had taken Wigram stepped in. He saw Elisabeth, and stood timidly still.

"That is young Furscher," Wigram said, introducing him. "And this is Elisabeth Koett, of whom you've heard a good deal—more than was good for you anyhow. Keep your seat, Elisabeth, and you, Furscher, look at her well. She is such an one as you would like to paint.

"Yes, she is such an one," said Furscher, lost in the contemplation of her.

"Well, then, paint her!"

"Yes . . . if I may!"

"Surely," cried Elisabeth, and sprang up. "I've never been painted. How are you going to pose me?"

She looked about for a mirror. There was one—almost a superfluity for Wigram—by the window.

"Hold!" cried Wigram. "Stay just as you are, Elisabeth, with your hands on your hair. Furscher!"

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"Yes, yes!" the young man assented.

"There," said Wigram, "is the woman of to-day. Behind her a whole sky full of harvest-time clouds—the sunshine of September, the melancholy of the dying year. And the woman herself stands before the mirror and, with a gentle anxiety, regards herself. Furscher, get out your colors!"

"I haven't any but landscape colors and a brown sketch."

"That will be admirable ground-work. Paint over it; make just a sketch. And quickly, or the clouds will shift and she will get tired. Paint the mood of the sky to-day, and throw in Elisabeth at the window in mere outline. She'll come back: won't you, Elisabeth? But the clouds float about in eternity, and will never again be the apotheosized bundles of veils that they are to-day."

And Furscher painted. Wigram, in the meantime, entertained Elisabeth with what she liked best, conversation on those poets who have known the heart of woman. But Elisabeth dreamed of her picture, and hoped that a whole world's young strength might stand before its magic and feel the stirring of infinite desires. . . .

Elisabeth came often.

Now at least these young people who began here the march of their fate had happy hours. Rasmus often joined them, and exhorted Furscher with his melancholy, homiletic voice:

"Note, Furscher, the deep, thoughtful, bluish-

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white of her eyes. They're gleaming too brightly. There must be a veil over them—a veil of desires and of dreams."

Or else:

"The shoulders are a shade higher. They lie in wait, a trifle cat-like. Gracious, Elisabeth, I've never seen such slender and flexible shoulders. You're like a leopard!"

She laughed and thanked him for the compliment.

"Furscher," he said another time, "oughtn't the bare arm which reaches up to the hair have a glazing of asphalt or Van Dyck brown?"

"I know what you mean," Furscher said. "I'm coming to those depths of tinting, to that sunny and velvety loveliness."

It was a troubling, an alluring picture. Upon those happy, far-faring clouds of the silvery-blue September sky there seemed to travel a sigh, a wish. . . . Elisabeth, too, grew daily more strange and spiritual. In the beginning it was the effect of a gently gnawing sorrow over herself and her art and her remorse. Thus Furscher drew a countenance full of a deep humility. And in addition, Elisabeth, who was permitted to read while the painter concentrated his attention upon her features, had taken up a stray sheet of the else carefully hidden writings of Wigram. And she felt that these sorrowful words had been inspired by her.

In truth, Wigram *had* written a poem in *terza rima* in those days when all his being was permeated with

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sorrow and yearning over the loss of her soul. And Wigram often made his way to philosophical clearness through the medium of verse which he loved equally. The poem which Elisabeth had found went thus:

" 'Tis this has given me sorrow's heritage
That on perfection I mine eyes had set,
And yet am spotted as life's common wage.

"But its remorse my heart could not forget,
And thus I kept me from their woeful fate
Who never knew the immortal passion's fret.

"O thou, to the world's wishes dedicate,
Seeking upon the highway what is born
Only within the secret soul's estate;

"There must I seek my wealth, deep and forlorn,
While from the loud mart where thy treasures be
Rings to me thine intolerable scorn.

"A different striving falls to thee and me:
The great command shall have my latest breath;
Life seekest thou and I Eternity,

"The while we both await an equal death."

"And it is thus that he thinks of me?" Elisabeth thought, and looked sadly at Wigram, who, lost in thought, had not observed her find. "And why, why does he always dwell on the thought of death. Every other word is of annihilation, of passing into the infinite. . . . In him the riddle of Egypt of old is embodied once again: to live for death. And to what does it all lead him? And is it true that I have become so estranged from what he calls the inner life?

'The while we both await an equal death. . . .'

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I have a subtle fear in me without his admonitions, and it may be that this life which I desire so much will end in my downfall."

She was very subdued in those days. She had no part assigned her, her extra funds were at an end, and her tastes, which had been pampered and exaggerated by Hiller, were helpless before her mere salary.

She didn't want to write to Hiller. Hitherto he had considered it a favor to be permitted to make her presents, in spite of which she felt that she had to pay too high a price for his assistance. If she would once condescend to ask for something, she felt that she would thereby yield up all right to her sustaining pride. And this pride seemed to her more precious than her chastity which, in truth, she had given up to him calmly. "No one would have believed in my purity, anyhow," she told herself bitterly, after the consummation of her bargain.

And, as she sat there, put to shame by Wigram's poem, which, though it was not a masterpiece, revealed to her the struggling of a mighty soul—as she sat there, half-confused by the sorrows and desires of her life, and yet victorious over both through her pride—Furscher painted her eyes.

When, at the end of the sitting, she saw her car on the curb, she reflected that she had better sell it. Her colleagues would deride her if she were known to live in a poor way and yet keep an auto.

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She managed the car so thoughtlessly in her distraught condition that, near her house, she ran down an old stage-hand, Christamentl, who had just brought her the manuscript of a new part. The old man fell heavily and bemoaned himself. A crowd gathered, a policeman came up and asked questions, but Elisabeth, almost weeping with shame, excitement, and pity, supported the old man into the house, had him carried upstairs, put in her bed, and then sent for a doctor. A reporter, who had heard rumors of a dangerous accident, came for an interview, and found old Christamentl well provided with bandages without, and port within, praising the excellent heart of Miss Koett, and declaring that in three days he would be back at his post. And the reporter was so touched by the anxiety and helplessness of the lovely, unknown actress that, next day, an admirable Elisabeth Koett anecdote went through all the papers.

"Heavens!" the manager thought, as he read it, and a happy thrill went down his spine. "She's got an auto."

And his whole judgment of her changed. She must be a good actress—a drawing-card, alluring and fashionable. He sent for her this very morning.

Elisabeth was frightened, and thought she was to be rebuked for causing so silly a disturbance in public. "At all events," she reflected, "it will give me the chance of making myself clear to him. I can't

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be left to go to seed here. Happily the return to Graz is free!"

But the manager smiled most engagingly.

"You're a great sportswoman, and you get us into nice messes! Don't you know that the theater can't get along without old Christamentl? Ask him himself. And you nearly killed him!"

"I wish it had been you instead," said Elisabeth dryly.

"Oho!"

"The idea of sending me such a part," she went on. "I hope it's a mistake. I am to be the gentle, tame Mrs. Elvstedt, and Miss Kalmen is to be Hedda Gabler! Have I irritating hair that takes everyone's attention? Am I the woman who would have given a humble squeak when Hedda imperiously pinched her arm? Do I look like a little fool, a dear little fool who should have kept her little hands from meddling with anyone's fate? Is that not rather a picture of Miss Kalmen, who plays all her parts with her fair hair and throat and shoulders?"

"Oh, but listen to me——"

"In short, I'm returning the part; it *must* have been exchanged for that of Hedda."

The manager noted with pleasure that Elisabeth grew paler and paler, and observed the delicate quivering of her nostrils, which he liked not only in beautiful horses. And he was adroit enough to ward off the imminent storm. He interrupted her.

"I see a way of dispensing with all explanations.

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Did old Christamentl, who has been ill at your house, confess to you that he made a mistake about the parts? Yes or no?"

Elisabeth hesitated a moment. Then she caught his drift and laughed merrily.

"Yes!"

"Well, then, all you've got to do is to persuade the old thickhead, so soon as he can walk, to go to Miss Helen and beg her pardon for having exchanged the parts."

"Ah, I think he'll do that."

"Very well. Memorize your part and"—he put his hand on her shoulder in paternal admonition, and felt with delight the movement of the impatient muscles under his grasp—"and see that you're a credit to me, dearest lady. I expect great, very great things of you!"

She took her leave with a bow directly imported from Paris. When she was on the stairs he called out to her once more:

"One word, dear friend! What make is your car?"

"Mercedes," she lied, infinitely amused, and hurried away.

The manager, however, leaned back in his arm-chair. He was full of admiration.

"Well, I'll be . . . Mercedes! No doubt, she's got brains. Mercedes . . . Well! . . . I wonder who gave it to her!"

XI

ELISABETH had arrived. Her playing of Hedda Gabler wrought upon all the delicate nerves of the great city. A poet of the nerves and the senses reviewed her acting in one of the leading papers. He had watched her all evening, devoured her glowing personality with eyes and ears, and, after the performance, he had been permitted to kiss her hands. All night the fragrance stayed with him. And so he wrote:

"One has scarcely ever seen such subtle, watchful flexibility of pose, such cool ingratiating cruelty, such manifoldedness in laughter, such wonderful interpretative power in color and quality of tone. Sensuality so transmuted into alluring cruelty is like the love of a Sphinx. In serious moments she assumed a light tone, but in this very lightness quivered a presage of storms that brooded over this terrible woman's soul. In this woman curiosity becomes a deadly passion and love a game. Miss Koett is highly complex, and yet again of striking simplicity. She is great and proud, and yet utterly perverse. She is sweet as a dream of love, yet full of somber presage as death. When, as Hedda, she derides her husband, when she derides him who would be her lover

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in words of apparent assent, but ineffable irony, we writhe under the sting of such cold superiority. And when her voice allures and promises, our hearts rise to our very throats, and our vitals tremble. How she assumes an appearance of passion from mere boredom! Hers is the love that kills. In her are concentrated all the instincts of our exquisite, morbid, self-deceived time, with its hopeless confusion and its insatiable yearning. If Miss Koett does not, in future performances, redeem the promise of last night, it will be because in playing Hedda Gabler she was playing herself. But we are not inclined to hold this view. The woman who, last night, played love and contempt and hatred in so subdued a key, and revealed her full greatness only in depicting coldness and cruelty—this woman will, some day, be able to utter the cry of an authentic passion, and then all the world will stop to hear."

It was true. The more sweetly, purely, and as a true woman, Miss Kalmen had played, the more cat-like had been Elisabeth's strained suspense in the face of her own utterances, with which she would then spring forth, irresistibly alluring.

All the women in the audience quivered with the desire to be such terrible creatures. The quiver reached the topmost gallery, and otherwise sane-minded students dreamed of the poignant bliss of dying from the wounds inflicted by such a vampyre.

Wigram had made use of a ticket which she had

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sent him, and suffered throughout the whole rich evening. This woman tortured him to death! She didn't any longer play for the sake of greatness and passion, as she had done in her small parts long ago; nor did she play in the service of a deep and terrifying humanity as she had done in her great and consecrated rendition of Lady Macbeth. Once upon a time she had played the part of a lost child in a mere shift. Now the one aim of every fold of her dress, of every wave of her hair, of every shadow, pose, or mirror, was seduction—nothing but that. He had lost all power over her. But she had power over him, and had poured poison into his stubborn blood.

In a box to the right of the stage sat the two who together were supposed to make a complete man: Rasmus and Count Severin Ziebern. There was an endless hunger in their eyes. Poor Severin was utterly captivated by this brilliant snake. The desire for this woman shook him like the horror of death.

To-night, after Elisabeth had rejected his boldest overture in the form of an invitation, he and Rasmus sat over their champagne alone. Severin drank; Rasmus dreamed; both tried to picture the possibility of laying violent hands upon her and wreaking their desires upon her body. And when Severin was utterly drunk he wanted to bet Rasmus that he would get hold of her after all!

"Never," chanted Rasmus, "never, never, never!"

"And if I have to marry her!"

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"She wouldn't be such a fool," laughed the cruel Rasmus, "as to become a countess with a thousand responsibilities. Now she's queen every night, and she can rule and shake and terrify, and grasp with those wonderful hands of hers all she wants."

Then Severin began to cry, and Rasmus had to put him to bed.

"But I'd let her play, y'know, I'd let her play!" he stammered till he went to sleep. . . .

From that night on Elisabeth was made. She had played the woman who rejects life upon any terms but the most luxuriously magnificent; she had played that boredom which trifles with the lives of men, and had played it for those whose whole aim is the search of an external interest.

She was accepted at her own valuation, and overshadowed the province from which she came. It was hoped on all sides that one would soon discover the parts she played in her private life.

Her picture was finished. She had nothing more to seek at Wigram's. The poem that, in the days of her care and uncertainty, had depressed her and made her thoughtful, now stirred her anger against him. She sent him no word of farewell or thanks. She took a bitter pleasure in the fact that from now on he must glow for her from the vantage of the highest gallery, or learn of her greatness from the press. He was done with. She had warmed herself at the flame of his spirit in the old raw days. Now she was near the sun and needed him no longer.

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Her picture was exhibited. Naturally. Not only because it had been painted with subtle allurements, but because it was of her. She entered the drawing-rooms of the city, and the picture shared her elevation. Furscher became famous; he had to paint women, women, more women, and he nearly went to pieces under the nervous rigors of his task. He painted the restless, flighty, tensely beautiful tigresses of society with as profound a consecration as though he had been Rafael painting Madonnas. He became the discoverer of the unsatisfied female eye. He painted the complexion that showed the veil of nocturnal sighs and tears. He painted the mouth that lies and lies, and desires to cry out the bitter truth. He painted the glance which has gained assurance by evaluating the things of the market-place, and desires to test its power on the distance of dreams; and he painted the swimming eye of the impassioned woman who clenches her hands in the certainty of approaching disillusion. And Furscher came to love these throats and this hair as well as the gorgeousness of pearls and silks. And he transfixed it all to his canvas with the indignation of the socialist. This he had in no wise lost, but it was less militant.

He revealed all the shabby aimlessness of the soul-life of these members of society, their constant search for the external fact, their pitiful borrowings from the man of thought whom, openly, they deride. He painted the disconsolateness of those who dwell with the fulfillment of all desires, stirred the miserable

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trappings of their life, and yet loved the whole pageant madly. He hated, he learned, he loved, and grew to be a great painter.

Now and then he would accost Wigram, from whom he had borrowed the spark that fired his genius, and he would further increase his indebtedness. But Elisabeth didn't cast one backward glance. She flew. Wigram said that the devil had fetched her: society considered that all the heavens had opened to her. She herself felt dizzy.

For she had entered an entirely different class from her own. She had entered the society of the heirs of earth. The latter was an expression of Wigram's. He knew nothing more detestable or pitiable than the man who, in his pride, eats what he has not earned. Naked comes man into the world, and his inner powers and his mother's love are all the gifts that nature has for him. And with these things alone he shall achieve greatness: first in the shadow of parental care; then relying on himself alone. To develop oneself through oneself—that seemed to him all the preciousness of life. All other activity he held to be mere diversion, a confession of the worthlessness of one's time. The striving, battling, growing—these were Wigram's men.

But Elisabeth now entered the ranks of ready-made humanity. These people were merely heirs, not only of their forebears' name and thrift and social order, but takers of alms down to the minutest details of life. Into the dimness of antiquity, perhaps to Greece it-

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self, reaches the heritage of social life and manners, and the corroding art of idleness. They had inherited their style of dress, their tone, their very jests. Their opinions, convictions, their very honor, had been given them as a waiter is given a tip, and, like the waiter, they had not regarded them, knowing the current average of value.

And this was the society into which Elisabeth stepped. She was no less an actress there than elsewhere, but no one noted how she stretched out spiritual and nervous feelers, how humbly and ecstatically she learned and learned. For she believed she had now come to the world and the fullness thereof, and she was intoxicated by this society, which acted as though it were a sponge, thirsty to suck up human greatness where it was to be found.

When its door opened to the next mere sensation of the season, it seemed equally athirst. But Elisabeth, having already formed her intimate circle beyond which she didn't look, noticed nothing of this fact.

Whether Elisabeth had first entered the society of the great by the grace of an ambassador or a minister of state, a brewer, a coal merchant, or a speculator in grain—this, too, was a moot question, which the papers, however, succeeded in solving.

And so Elisabeth was no longer with those who question fate and agonize over their souls. She was with the folk of ready-made opinions and tailor-made garments. And yet, even here, she instinctively

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sought men—real men—and found a few. For instance, she made the, at first, deceptive acquaintance of George Hameler.

When the young man whose toilet was, most obviously, a difficult and elaborate work of art, was introduced to her, he bowed to Elisabeth, but, even a moment before, waved his hand lightly toward his hostess.

"If you please, dear lady, don't you with your feeling for rhythm, for music, forget the exceeding importance of the e's in my name: George Hameler!"

Elisabeth was interested.

"Why George Hameler and not Georg Hamler?"

"Because Georg Hamler," answered the young exquisite, "might equally well be the name of a dealer in mutton, and because my nature is deliberate, discriminating, inclined to harmony and thoughtfulness."

"I think I understand you," she replied.

"Since there's but one life to be lived," he went on, "one should, at least, develop in one's personality and life a stylistic note that is all one's own. In some such sense I apprehend the 'Know thyself' of Socrates. We are all too much alike, and we should insist on the fine distinction, the delicate shade. I'm averse to a difference that roars."

His speech was as deliberate as his toilet. His words came from him elaborately, as though he were handing out jewels. To Elisabeth they seemed equally precious.

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"You see," Hameler explained, "I don't usually care to know any lady who isn't indubitably of the great world. You come to Vienna, no one knows how, but in an auto. You play Hedda, and prove your superiority to us all. I am astonished, hesitant, perturbed. Well, here I am. I don't ask where you come from or whence you have this nature which can only be inherited, only inherited——"

"Is that so?" Elisabeth asked defiantly. Hameler evidently desired to know something of the janitorial paternal roof, and the proletarian in her was irritated. "So all these confidence-men and *parvenus*, who deceive your circles so successfully, they, too, I suppose, have inherited that masterly delicacy of tone?"

"Confidence-men?" Hameler asked calmly. "Yes; they are geniuses in the realm of manners, just as geniuses, in the real sense, are confidence-men in the realm of the intellect. You don't belong here, you weren't brought up to it, and yet you understand. . . ."

"Very well," said Elisabeth, "I'm a *parvenu*. But do introduce me to that young fellow over there who has sought me all evening. I'd like to hear a few less sophisticated compliments."

Hameler looked around.

"I see three aspirants," and before she knew it he had introduced a youth to her whom she had not seen hitherto: "Herr Syrup, banker. Am I right?" He spoke with infinite condescension.

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"Bank clerk for the present," said Syrup, beaming with so moist a joy as though he were covered with the substance that his name signified. He gave Elisabeth a slippery but piteously timid and trembling hand. No king ever saw such enthusiasm blossom beneath his glance as Elisabeth saw in Herr Syrup, and while he stammered a commonplace she knew that she was a divinity in his heart. It pleased her, and she went on between the self-contained Hameler and Syrup, from whose very pores a cloud of fear and happiness, of pride and humility, fidelity, enthusiasm and timidity, seemed to exude.

"In reality," Elisabeth said softly to Hameler, "I meant that gentleman;" and she pointed to a good-looking fellow who regarded her as though she were a fallen star.

"Ah yes," Hameler smiled. "That's better, but still weak, weak. . . ."

"Who?" she asked.

"The gentleman in question."

The young man came up with his great, round eyes, apparently remonstrating with someone who was pushing him on. Before Hameler could say another word, however, Rasmus emerged and introduced Count Severin von Ziebern. Elisabeth laughed and Ziebern gained courage enough to offer his arm.

Rasmus shook her free hand.

"Let me look at you," she said to him. "Why, Rasmus, you're as fine as you can be."

"Oh yes," said Rasmus triumphantly. "I have

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that art, too. Does the suit fit the man, Herr Hameler?"

"*This* suit *this* man?" Hameler echoed in gentle derision. "Admirably, and that's the main thing."

Rasmus managed to draw Hameler and Syrup aside. He wanted to help his ward who, in the meantime, was insisting to her of his love in a way at once touching and impudent.

"Listen, my friend," said Elisabeth, as he pressed her arm. "Anyone who doesn't regard me as a lady is a vulgarian. With that warning you may describe your love."

He became subdued at once, elegant and respectful. She discussed his passion with him, and his prayers seemed to run, like a shower, down her skin. She was tingling with delight when, fifteen minutes later, she forced him to abandon his post to other admirers. In his eyes she saw the look of a faithful hound who had been told to stay at home.

"It's all an inherited instinct," Wigram would have said, "the instinct which makes these people live for nothing but to be the dogs of women—lap-dogs, hunting-dogs, promenade-dogs—what you will."

But Elisabeth was happy, nor was she untouched by the fact that even young counts fell victims to her charms. She looked about her: who next?

They came. A whole army full of admiration, and she drank in her happiness through every pore.

She picked out for special notice a critic who was known to oppose the Viennese cult of the individual.

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"You're the one who envy us our bit of pleasure in regarding the world from above!" she said.

"Ah," he answered, "don't you know the much higher joy of creating greatness for oneself, to be carried on the wings of a spiritual success?"

"Such a joy may be native to the study," she said. "But I see well that you've never felt that passion of power which I experience when my glances, my gestures, my voice master the thousand-hearted crater of the pit, when in all this field of pallid, human flowers, my passion throbs; when I am the source of *all* power!"

The critic looked at her with pleasure.

"I don't blame you. I blame the people who run to the theater not for the poet's but for the actor's sake. I'm depressed because ninety out of a hundred avoid a performance of *Lear* and run after the stupidest stuff if one of their idols appears in it."

"You see," Elisabeth said, laughing, "they're the people who haven't it in them to have true gods. You'd better be pleased that they worship us poor idols. Else they might all be deflected to musical comedy. They do desire to adore something, and that's a fine trait. It's a kind of seeking of the ideal, after all. Their admiration does develop them. Power is communicable and, in the moments of their highest enthusiasm, they become my equals. This feeling of oneness quivers through the public, and

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through myself. I give them the privilege of soaring, and they love me for it. And they—these thousand hearts—cry out: 'We cannot be great. You are what we can never be. But we are grateful for the chance of being lost in your greatness.'

She went on after a moment.

"And this power that I have gives me a wild and magnificent pleasure—a large and impersonal ecstasy. It is infinite in joy and affirmation. I feel, at such moments, as if I were more than an individual, as if I were almost identical with the All."

"Almost the cosmic passion of the pantheist," said the clever critic. "Perhaps you are right. The many do, for a moment, yield up their own souls to a great soul, and, at that moment, they live through you. I observe, too," he went on, "that our public has a certain instinct in such matters. It never follows mere intellect, or mere deliberate art, however exquisite and subtle, but always those impassioned temperaments who have a threefold energy of life. Fine execution in art alone doesn't appeal to the Viennese, nor the weary talent that is satisfied with execution, that isn't lashed into the arena by some new vision. No, our people desire to be transported."

The journalist went, although Elisabeth asked him to stay a little longer.

"I don't feel at ease here," he confessed. "And now that I have a thought, I'd like to follow it out on the streets."

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And so the only human being there who might have helped her, who was not utterly satisfied with himself, took flight. Only the ready-made people remained, with their ready-made fashions, opinions, manners, souls. To these Elisabeth belonged henceforth.

XII

A few weeks later Elisabeth sat with her dress-maker, carefully thinking out costumes. Even so she had once sat with Wigram over the creations of the great poets. In addition to her part she displayed at least one new costume to every act. And these externals were a matter of instinct with her, and had been so ever since she was an obscure super. With every step, with every fold of her dress, with a shawl or a hat-band, with a bit of silk, with all these things she strove to evoke the rapture of passion that was her end and aim.

She was thoroughly conscious of the fact that the great city primarily demanded of her something other than the re-creation of the characters of great poets. She was still anxious for a good repertory, but in this respect she met the opposition of the manager. Once when she had taken it into her head to play Cleopatra, the permission was refused her even when she consented to be satisfied with the so-called classical Thursday evenings, which had fallen into disuse for some time.

"Shakespeare is a luxury that's only fit for the subsidized *Burgtheater*," the manager had insisted. "The public doesn't want tragedies in the grand

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style or historical plays. There hasn't been a war in long, and there's little seriousness left."

And so Elisabeth began to accustom herself to study those parts which her most famous fellow-actresses like to play: first Magda, then gradually shallower parts, until finally she took up plays in which the playwright had not sought to depict men and women, joy and terror, but simply *affaires d'amour*. But in these very ephemeral plays she felt the passion of her own power most keenly. For though she felt the utter emptiness of these fables and their puppets, she had the true creative joy in clothing these puppets in flesh and blood, and in feeling that they owed all to her. And thus, in increasing measure, she used plays that were written for the day only. Even Magda became too "classical" for her taste. It was a part, in brief, for which the author had done too much; it could owe her too little. She looked for plays that were overshadowed by a single female character of the most modern type, the other characters being mere pawns in this woman's game. Thus she played poor plays for the weary public. And these plays seemed magnificent, for she put into them the significance, the glow, the passions, and presentiments of her own soul. In other words: she played *herself* in the guise of these mighty women of the day.

But even her zeal for poor plays didn't last long.

In the meantime, however, she had become a mir-

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ror of fashion for all Viennese society. People began even to imitate the modulation of her voice and her way of sitting down. But she remained insatiable in her study of that very society. It was her all in all, for she nursed the dream that in it she might find her hero whom alone, in her soul, she loved, the great, impassioned, aspiring Man!

She began to take an interest in the turf. She acquired the timid, elegantly hesitant manner of the aristocrat when he finds himself in the exclusive society of commoners, no matter how intelligent. And she also learned to sound the precise note of the aristocrats among themselves.

A good deal she learned from Hameler. Once she had taken from Wigram the spiritual *timbre* of an absorption in great thoughts; Hiller had taught her the ease and grace and carelessness of social life; Gundenau a meditative quietude; Rasmus the glory of the impassioned pose, and Eppelin the exquisite hesitancy of the hyper-cultured will. But Hameler taught her his own art of impressing upon all mankind the sovereignty of his own significance.

"One must know how to act one's own character," he told her in that deliberate, superior, precious tone of his which she had imitated in a part in Sudermann's *Battle of Butterflies*. "One must simply," he continued, "take a sufficient interest in oneself and have a sufficient respect for oneself. And why shouldn't one? Isn't each individual really, so to speak, the curator of himself? To force the human

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material of one's own soul and personality to an ultimate perfection—that is true culture.”

She liked him exceedingly. He was the most exquisite of them all. And then he had a great deal of money, and she needed a great deal. Hence the least of his slow words was interesting to her.

“Why don't I call myself Jörg, as so many do?” he said. “Because that form of the name has the savor of ancient armor and mailed fists. George—that's like a quiescent exquisitely groomed hand. And this feeling for one's individual style must permeate the minutest details of life. The result of such training will be an aristocrat, a much more genuine one than young Ziebern, for instance, who has so little confidence in nothing as in himself. Culture raised to the *n*th power and aristocracy: the two are one.”

Such speeches pleased her. For she felt it keenly that, while she was simulating countesses and duchesses on the stage, the real countesses and duchesses leaned back in their boxes and waved their fans. This contrast made her restless, and only Hameler could soothe her by pointing out that these aristocratic persons were weak enough, and that they were really imitating her—Elisabeth Koett.

“What do you do with yourself?” she asked him once.

“I'm an artist.”

“An artist; but I never read anything about you in the papers.”

“I'm not an artist for the benefit either of the pa-

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pers or for the innumerable failures of mankind, but for myself and my friends. Now and then I invite the best artists to test their judgment on my work. Of course, these things do sicker through to public notice, and, some day, I may be famous against my will."

"What do you work at?"

"I model."

"In clay?"

"Only in wax. I like to work with the most delicate material. I go on delightful trips in search of ivory and rare marbles and colored stone. Why don't you come to see me? I'd love to make a bust of you. And I'll make something different of you from Furscher's performance. In his picture you are a demon with whom one would fear—I beg your pardon—to share one's couch. I see in you that victorious and exquisite beauty that wrings itself free from the depths of the people. And of that I should like to mold an image in Pentelican marble. I found an entrancingly lovely block of it—the golden glints of your skin are in the material—in the ruins of Sybaris. It's enough for head and shoulders. Then for the dress we might take the grayish matrix of lapis-lazuli, or something greenish—*verde antico*—or iridescent wood with a tendency to deep indigo. Then, too, we will need something to balance the splendor of your hair, which will be of Japanese bronze. The dress, too, will be shot with metal, and the eyes . . . the eyes. . . . Ah, Elisabeth, if you

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look at me that way I won't be able to think of a material worthy of your eyes."

But Elisabeth continued to let her eyes rest on his. She was delighted with the exquisite manifestations of his passion, and she thought: "Can't I dominate him more wholly?"

"Elisabeth, you most beautiful being; you are now the object of all my thoughts. Won't you help me, also, in my art?"

"Won't that require many hours?"

"You will come, Elisabeth?"

"I will come," she said with singular somberness of tone, and a double promise lay in her words.

But George Hameler trembled in every limb. It was almost devoid of style! . . .

He had modeled the head in wax. He rather spent hundreds of *gulden* for wax than use the sticky clay. And Elisabeth's head required the most delicate kind of wax. Now the amber-colored head was finished, as exquisite as a piece of early Renaissance workmanship.

Now came the shoulders, and he begged Elisabeth to bare them a little, only just below the collar-bone. She did it seriously and quietly, and he gazed at the pallid skin of her slender form. He could not work.

"Do start," she said, "I'm a little cool." She moved her shoulders gently.

"Permit me to give you a certain pose," he begged.

He got up, trembling, and laid his hands gently on

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the lovely shoulders, as if to bend them forward. Tears came into his eyes.

"Oh, you are beautiful, Elisabeth . . . I can't, can't. . . ."

His lips sank upon her loveliness . . . she trembled.

This man, more exquisite of nerves than even Epelin—she loved him. She knew what love was, at last. Or didn't she, after all? It was too late for reflection. . . .

Ah, yes, she loved him, more surely than she had loved Hiller who, every time he came to Vienna, wrote her desperate letters, and lit his passion anew with the sight of her person and her playing.

But when she had been Hameler's mistress for a few days only she began to reflect about herself and him. And that terrible, endless warning, which was her glory and her fate, stirred in her blood: farther, farther!

What was wrong with her? Why couldn't she love with that utter self-surrender which, as an actress, she knew how to depict so well. And the might of her yearning for a great love was such that under its influence she could play irresistibly all the rapture, the surrender, the thirst of an immortal passion. Her very eyes changed, and all men said: How that woman must be able to love! And hundreds dreamed a dream of those pallid arms of hers, and would have given their lives to know the glory of fire that consumed her.

But she herself grew more and more restless, and

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thirsted ineffably after the love that she had never known. If a man stood before her who pleased her, her gift of herself—whether it was to Hiller or to Hameler—was but a cheerful alms that had at heart a sting of restlessness and dissatisfaction. And so this richly gifted, utterly poor soul had hours of remorse because she had not kept herself unspotted for him whom she would once love with all the tragic strength of her being. Him she awaited, her champion of the soul, in whose eyes would shine the divine woe over her own finite insufficiency, the great silent man with a heart of fire.

Hameler, however, was impressed by her cool way of taking the central passion of life. It seemed to him highly distinguished. It is true that his vanity was gently tortured by the thought that he couldn't arouse in her a fiercer flame. But he considered that so consuming a flame as hers would be, might bring in its train terror and discomfort. Yet something was always lacking to the culmination of his desires. He remained athirst and but half-content.

He furnished her with endless money. That belonged to his style. A part of this she sent her parents, the rest she spent for magnificent dresses. She had saved nothing so far. She often wondered that he didn't desire to appear in public with her to boast of his possession. But he preserved a chivalrous silence in regard to their relations and the nature of them was unknown.

At their club Ziebern, who was half desperate, as-

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sailed Hameler again and again with the question, whether Elisabeth were accessible. The Count had determined to challenge his friend if he discovered him to be Elisabeth's lover. Hameler suspected as much from Ziebern's pallor whenever he put the question. And the handsome Count was always delighted to hear the identical answer: "She is cold and heartless."

Once she read a poem that had been written on Furscher's portrait of herself. And so, when Hameler sat opposite her working at her bust, she said to him:

"Isn't it nice to have one's picture and oneself vie with each other in poetry? The poet asks the picture ten questions: 'Are you as yearning and as sad as you seem? Are you as somber? Are you as restless, as reproachful of the world, as full of strange presage, and as sweetly silent? O picture, *you* are silent: I dare not ask *you*, Elisabeth, to tell me your secrets.' That's about his meaning. I must get you the number of the magazine in which the poem appeared. And, George, why don't you write about me? You write such lovely poems, rhymeless, and yet full of music."

He looked carefully at her exquisite nostril, whose marble counterfeit he was delicately filing. He sought to impart the nervous quiver of life to his material. He loved intimately the wonderful golden tones in the flesh-colored marble. At last he answered Elisabeth's question.

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"All true art," he said, "is a love of the medium of that art. I chisel my verses in lovely language, even as I should like to chisel a face in ice. I handle each word as though it were a jewel. Some of these words are but semi-precious stone and, like milk-quartz, need to be filed into beauty. But some glow like rubies or have the lofty clearness of chrysolite. There, for instance, is the word: *meadow*. All the grasshoppers in the world tremble in it, and the grass bends its spears in deep, velvety waves, and the dear sunlight shines. . . . I have nothing but contempt for the poets of their own passions, the professional exploiters of their own emotional life. If a woman has made you happy, be grateful and—keep it to yourself. If she won't accede to your desires you need not, at least, throw your humiliation into the market-place. A man of fine self-respect will make public neither his joys nor his desires, and assuredly not his humiliations."

And he continued chiseling: an image of gracefulness and delicacy.

Elisabeth looked thoughtfully upon the handsome, thoroughly finished product of modern manhood before her. There was no strife in his soul; he had reached the height of his own ideal. . . . He had formed the delicate wax-model with his own hands. The marble, however, he had given to an intelligent Italian stone-cutter, who had cut away all superfluous material until the contours of the figure were visible. Not until then had Hameler laid his own

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elegant hands upon the statue. He scarcely used the mallet, and only a little dwarf-chisel. He worked largely with files, of all degrees of coarseness and delicacy. He gnawed, nay, he whetted his way into the marble.

And, involuntarily, Elisabeth had to think of another worker in marble of whom the all but forgotten Wigram had told her. A vision arose before her: the many-columned Rome of the palaces of the Renaissance. Near the Tiber, by the marble-blocks that lay before the Bocca della Verita, stood a bare and lonely house. In a room, half-stable, half-barn, a man stood at his work—a lean, sinewy, homely man, with great, heavy, dark-brown eyes. The look in those eyes would have been merely sad, had it not been of so somber a magic.

The man looked with bitter reproach upon the sun, which had reached the horizon's edge, and hurled great balls of flame upon the cool white marble which resounded under the master's blows. Hardly had morning seemed to pass, and here was the night! He had forgotten the day, so wildly had he worked. He had not eaten. And now he trembled with weakness and with the ecstasy of creation, and with impatience to work on.

Roughly he grasped a piece of dry bread that had lain there since noon unseen. But even while he ate his eyes did not leave his work, which was thrice as large as himself. A gigantic head arose out of the marble; its features were still half-adream in the

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stone's primal life, unfinished, growing, struggling into spiritual birth. It was as if a drowsy god were separating himself slowly from the crags of the universe.

The master drank with his bread the sour wine of the Campagna and felt new strength in his veins. His hand, on which the mighty resilience of his tools had left great callouses, grasped the chisel. In his other hand he took the hammer and beat upon the chisel in rage and ardor and creative glow, and the great chips flew under his impassioned strokes. Titan-like he took by storm the divinity which he knew hidden in the marble. He cried out upon the hard stone, spoke words of cheer to the chisel, and far resounded the echoing blows of the mallet. He burst the bark upon the tree of Beauty.

And the dun evening came, but the great blows resounded out into the falling night. The threatening clouds of a darkening heaven still saw him at work, upon his head a helmet that bore a torch. The torch nodded upon that daring head, strange gleams of light shivered upon the reddish wall, and tirelessly rose and descended the shadow of that mighty hand.

Blow upon blow broke from the consuming fires of his soul. Through crags he hewed his way to immortality, this stormer of art's fortress, this man of woe, this incarnation of the strife of the world, this man, greatest of all in somberness, in purity, in power—Michael Angelo Buonarotti.

Elisabeth looked upon him who thought himself her

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lover, called his life a work of art, and chiseled around at it with—a nail-file.

A profound dissatisfaction assailed her. Did she, the aspirant of an unknown life, did she do right to live with those whose narrowness was so complete?

She thought of Wigram. He was such an one who threw his life into the breach for an ideal, who was always learning, and was never done: like a cloud whose destiny is fulfilled only in its death.

He, too, was working, full of woe, at some great masterpiece—she knew not what—like yonder man at Rome.

Had she done right to eschew those who held themselves but tools in the hands of the Eternal Artist?

What was she seeking? Greatness through the erring life of the world, or greatness through her own erring soul?

For the sake of her art she had sold herself: but her soul was no less athirst after all that is greatest in all times.

Hameler interrupted her thoughts.

“I’ll have to stop now and wait till the hair comes from the foundry. Then I’ll chisel it so artistically that one will imagine it possible to hold separately each one of those incredible little curls which will stand, old-gold, against the darker background of your tresses. I have to give the hair this bronze tone before I can determine the degree of pallor of the skin under the eyes—those dear, night-shadowed eyes which whisper the sweetness of your secret sins.”

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"I don't find sin sweet," she said wildly.

He knew this sudden outburst of her mood and feared the storm that would follow unless he could deflect it.

"Come," he said, "let's go to the *Kärthnerstrasse* and visit the jewelers. You can buy whatever you want until sin does seem sweet to you."

She looked at him with a gentle threat in her eyes.

"What if I ruin you?"

He smiled calmly.

"George Hameler would never lose his equilibrium in so vulgar a fashion," he said.

She felt that this man was not wholly in her power, hence she yielded and let herself sink to a frivolous mood. For she loved precious stones, and especially the pearls that had the pallid iridescence of her own skin.

For a space she forgot him who hewed his rage and woe into the cliff-side, and smiled delight upon the art that polishes pebbles.

XIII

THERE were many whose souls sickened with longing for that austere and beautiful Elisabeth Koett of the days that were gone.

In the old home Gundenau, grown aged, found little comfort in his loveliest Ionian coins. He wasn't well, and couldn't get at the cause. The art of the stage in Graz seemed to him poverty-stricken since the one divinity of all nerves was gone. And so he discovered that the greater art had been his greater consoler, and that the coins were but the playthings of worthless hours. He made up his mind that he needed a change of air and went to Vienna. He persuaded himself that he went, also, to buy some lovely coins of Alexander. But while his thoughts dwelled on the noble profile of the conqueror of Asia, there interposed the golden pallor of Elisabeth's face. . . .

He wanted to see what had become of her, and so went to see her during Holy Week.

Elisabeth was bored as always when the weather was fair and the theaters closed, and her admirers did not drive time into the wave of some Lethean stream.

When Gundenau came she was at first ashamed because he couldn't help seeing all about the evidences of wealth. Indeed, for a moment she was almost angry. He and Wigram were the only beings to

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whom she was bound by the tie of a pure gratitude. But the old gentleman looked so tired, so timid, so quenched, that a deep compassion at once got the better of her. And this compassion gave her a mastery over this pure-hearted gentleman whom she had formerly respected with a measure of trepidation.

He stood helpless among her carpets, and she hastened to him with an air of daughterly helpfulness. She led him gently to a divan, placed pillows at his back and under his feet, and a happy mood came over her in playing the part of boundless gratitude.

She asked him a thousand questions, ranging from the easy-chair in the garden meadow of his little country-seat, and his antique coins, to his sciatica; and from his box in the theater at Graz to the crutch which he was now obliged to carry. He was happy, confused, moved, and refreshed, and the more he called her his treasure, his daughter, the more she delighted in throwing herself into the part thus suggested.

She made tea for him with her own hands, told him of all her parts, and asked him whether, at a certain dramatic moment, she should grip her audience by crying out or by keeping an ominous silence.

The bell rang while they were speaking. It was Hameler, but she refused him admission. This was not the day of Eros for her, who desired to be Agape.

"Who is this Hameler?" the Baron asked.

"A handsome, clever, cultivated artist," she said

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carelessly and superficially; "he's cutting my head in Pentelican marble."

"Ah, I wish you had let him in. I like to meet such people."

"No! No!" She stamped her foot. "I want you alone; I'm jealous."

And the old gentleman was as happy as a child.

He stayed till evening, letting himself be spoiled and petted. Then he drove to his hotel, in a blessed frame of mind, because there was still gratitude left in the world. And he had found it—wonder of wonders—in the theatrical world.

He was quite intoxicated.

He remained in Vienna until Elisabeth returned to the stage after Holy Week. On Easter Sunday he saw her for a few scenes as Gretchen in *Faust*, in which she played the confusion of a young girl utterly in love with such bewildering magic that it seemed to him as if all the airs of his lost youth blew upon him.

But he had trouble with his cerebral circulation, and didn't dare to stay the play out. The girl excited him too exquisitely, and such excitement he had to avoid.

All during the night he grew worse; he fled home with the morning express, but death, he knew, was beating its shadowy wings over him.

In Graz he was more at ease, but terribly weak. The end, he saw, was coming, slowly, perhaps, but surely.

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But above all the helplessness of these last, trembling, but serene weeks hovered one joy—the memory of Elisabeth's gratitude. The world seemed lovely and good, and all its sins expiated by the miracle of an actress's gratitude. One thing tortured him: that he had given her so little. He had given her a modest stipend, far too little to buy the superb costumes necessary for playing the great lady upon the modern stage. And by such stinginess he had driven her into the arms of a man to whom she had consciously sold herself through the necessities of her ambition. She had told him of that matter openly, and in her clear cello-like voice there had been neither sadness nor anger, only a deep thoughtfulness occasioned by that necessity. Never again, he swore, should that clear brow be shadowed by material care; never again should she be forced to give her love except—for love.

And so he, the last childless descendant of his race, framed a will making Elisabeth his sole heir. And in the will he stated the reason for his action:

“By the greatness of her soul Elisabeth Koett made my last days beautiful; she has drawn nearer to me than a child through her gratitude. I gave her scarcely the means of life, and purely and greatly, without my farther help, she attained the height of her ambition. And for the bits of copper which my niggardliness spared her she gave me in return the pure gold of a virtue in whose existence on earth I

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did not believe until my last days revealed it to me through her.

"Elisabeth was good and true to me as though I had been the father of her blood and of her rich heart. And therefore I will do for her what a dying father can do for his child. She brightened my last hours, and once more made the world seem fair . . ."

He died, and Elisabeth was a rich woman.

The charming passage in Gundenau's will which concerned Elisabeth soon made the rounds of the daily papers, and when, in her next great part, she appeared on the stage in a magnificent robe of black lace, such a storm of love, enthusiasm, pity, and jubilation greeted her that even the sophisticated skeptics of the Vienna pit, whose insight into life is morbidly keen, were moved.

Gundenau's splendid collection of coins was auctioned off at a memorable sale, and dispersed to the four winds of heaven. And that evening, after the performance, Elisabeth spoke to Hameler. Her face was pale and unmoved.

"The bust of me is done. Are you going to exhibit it?"

"Never. It's my best intimate possession—to be a solace of my lonely hours."

"Don't be a fool! Exhibit it!"

"Never!"

"Then keep it—instead of me—for your lonely

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hours," she said coolly. "I'm sick of your insipid talk. And I've sold myself for the last time! By God, for the last time! Good-by."

So George Hameler got his ticket-of-leave, in a chill, highly individual way. . . .

Elisabeth was free. She was beloved, desired, mighty in her influence over the souls of men, and withal so wealthy that her word was law at the theater. For long she had felt the sting of restlessness and impatience in her blood. The actress in her desired change and travel, and every quarter she tortured the manager to release her.

"It's ridiculous how I have to gild empty falsehoods on this stage," she reproached the manager. "My soul cries out after human souls, and I have to play pawns and dummies! I've a perfect horror of myself; I've grown as empty as the characters with which you stuff the maw of your shallow public. Why don't you put on *Troilus and Cressida*? That would create a great stir! I'll play a Cressida for you that will frighten myself. But once, just once, let me live with a true poet. Otherwise I'll go to Berlin. I've been offered thirty thousand marks there. And look at the repertory: Sophocles, Shakespeare, Molière, Goethe! That's what the maligned, uncultured Berlin public wants!"

"I'll get a suitable play by Oscar Wilde for you," the manager consoled her.

Rage took hold of her.

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"I want to play human beings, poor, weak, passionate, wild men and women—not machines who turn out clever talk."

"Well, then, I'll write to Bernard Shaw and try to get something for you. He's modern and humanly possible! Eh?"

She quieted down, although she didn't like this theater, at which she had no friends except old Wullenweber, and the serving-man, Christamentl, over whose old bones she had ridden to glory. Christamentl, to be sure, kept her informed of all the intrigues of her colleagues, so that she always captured the best parts. But her restlessness did not abate, and she looked on all sides for that better world which she longed for so passionately. She would have liked to ask Wullenweber concerning his experience with traveling troupes. But every morning, before and after rehearsal, he sat over his beer. Then he slept till twilight, took up his beery station again till the time of the performance, and afterward returned to it till the stroke of two. Since she could not live up to this programme, the information she got was slender, and led to no decision. Nevertheless, his resolute tongue took her part against the other women of the theater, and even against those who were not her enemies, but who reproached her with her want of solidarity and comradeship.

But just this reserve and silence surrounded her with a halo of legend. People knew little of her; she never spoke of herself, and now she was rich. If a

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colleague borrowed money of her, she gave it without friendliness, but also without humiliating the recipient. She never asked for repayment. This icy way of giving saved her from being unduly exploited. Not until all other sources had been exhausted would anyone approach her. It was even thought that, thus, she desired to place everyone in a position of dependence upon her, that some day she would assert the power so gained, and, perhaps, desire to undertake the management of the theater herself.

And, in truth, she had changed in many ways.

She didn't, for instance, expend a particle of nervous energy on the rehearsals. She felt that in the practice of such art as this the springs of her temperament would run dry, and she became sparing of it. Also, she despised her fellow-actresses, and would not throw herself into her work under their coldly watchful eyes. Hence manager and stage manager, as well as the other actors, lived in a state of scarce tolerable suspense before the putting on of any new play. Because they could not judge her work by the rehearsals. She was distraught, careless, indifferent. But when night came she compelled the audience with her old power; the manager's anxiety changed to jubilation; the box-receipts rose and fell in proportion to the frequency of her appearance. She became indispensable, and could do as she pleased.

But in eternal search for something more she

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looked about her. What now? Whither now? "Farther," the voice within her cried, "farther!"

Should she join the *Burgtheater*? The management there was not disinclined to engage her, but her violence, her pride, and her shifting moods were feared. She wanted to play the best of everything, and she had, therefore, the ladies of the court-theater in solid phalanx against her. Occasionally she thought that she would like to break this phalanx. If she were to marry a member of the high aristocracy, they couldn't help taking her there. But the highborn gentlemen all wanted a magnificent mistress. Even Ziebern, young and silly as he was, still hoped to get her on his own terms. To be sure, now that she was rich, matters were somewhat different. Now she was a good match, and might be taken to replace the pearls in some count's coronet that was ready to take its way to the pawnbroker's.

If only she could have loved—with a hot, foolish, unreasoning passion, full of tears and laughter! Once she had thought that art was stealing her power of human passion. But now she was disgusted with her own performances. And it never occurred to her that this was due to her lack of reverence for the works that she interpreted.

She was bored to extinction.

For a time she invited a great deal of company. Even Hameler could appear there as a mere friend, even Hiller the desperate came to light there from time to time. And there Furscher sat devouring with

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his eyes her face and throat and shoulders. He would like to have painted her once more, with a tragic motif this time—naked, a queen cast into a tower of serpents, mastering the fanged and writhing beasts with mighty incantations. Thus he dreamed of symbolizing the dæmonic power of her art. Once, touched with wine, he made her the monstrous proposition of standing for him in this guise. She looked at him and softly turned her head from side to side:

“When you are one of the world’s masters; when the hearts of men tremble at the sound of your name as at the sound of Lionardo’s or Buonarotti’s or Titian’s—then ask again.”

He didn’t himself believe in the possibility of such greatness, this clever painter of lovely women, who grew more and more into the smoothness of the drawing-room.

Rasmus was present at the incident, and sighed over her Philistinism; Ziebern, on the other hand, felt the impulse to horsewhip Furscher. Pale with excitement he approached the artist, but seeing the latter’s calm, care-free face, he offered him a cigarette instead.

Opposite them at the table sat Herr Syrup, his glowing face, like the sun at a wood’s edge, full of a sense of devoutness. He was utterly lost in his adoration of Elisabeth.

And this faithful admiration that asked little pleased her. Syrup was always among her guests, and always had his place in the pit. He lived wholly

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through her art, and an incomparable happiness flooded his days since she had come to Vienna. He asked for nothing, he didn't approach her with any intimacy; he circled about her as the moon does about the sun.

For a time she had made friends with that critic who was so opposed to the Viennese cult of personality. But since the publication of Gundenau's will, he, too, overflowed with unmixed admiration and approval. Like Gundenau, he was an optimist, and believed heartily in the greatness and goodness of Elisabeth Koett. He sang her praises so persistently that she thirsted for criticism and contradiction.

Thrice she invited Wigram to join her circle, and thrice he refused. Then her heart grew wild, angry, and obdurate. For the first time in her life there was someone for whom she was not good enough; for the first time a man would have nothing to do with her.

And once, when the others vied in singing her praises, she cried out: "Stop, you fools! I am neither good nor noble nor gentle nor great-hearted. I am ungrateful. I am great, perhaps; great enough to commit a murder. I hunger after evil. I would like to feed these Viennese and their press with horrors."

"Bravo," said the critic. "You have the heart of a great artist. Without this wild lust for the demonic you could not be a tragic actress."

But her soul was torn by disgust and with wild eyes she measured her two former lovers, those conquerors

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by the grace of banknotes. She would like to have goaded them at each other, so that one might slash the other with a sword.

These were her moods at the height of her fame and wealth and good fortune, when the keen envy of all competitors beat upon her like a fierce light, and the adoration of a passionate, lighthearted people covered her with its glory. Only the evenings brought relief. For then she played her heart clean—clean of disgust and rage and yearning and the thirst of love. She who had now no lover felt in such hours as though she was the beloved of humanity itself, and that was a blessed mood. But the night came with its loneliness and its agony.

XIV

IN the meantime the soul of Wigram suffered as if it had to expiate not only its own sins, but those of the lost heart of Elisabeth. In heavy mood he had seen her ascent, which was more and more in the direction of worldly goods; his tortured vision had to note that which he held genius in woman—after one brief heavenward flare—go the way of the world and the flesh.

He despaired of woman, and of the whole race of German Austria. For this seemed to him the touchstone of a people's worth—the production of men and women who, forgetful of self, can throw their lives into the arena for a great cause. Instead, he saw rabid party politicians, from motives of basest self-seeking, goad gifted races¹ into an intensity of hatred and sell themselves for the sake of some pitiful advantage. He saw the chiefs of science use the sacred universities as alms-houses merely for themselves and their families, and hence he saw truly productive scholarship repressed in the ranks of the laity and almost smothered. In the highest circles he

¹ The author refers here, as often afterward, to the struggle between the Slavic nationalities and the Germans in the Austrian monarchy. The fight has been both cultural and political and has grown sharper in recent years.—*Translator.*

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saw an unworthy thoughtlessness mock the difficulty and seriousness of the time, and where the sacred and eternal laurel of earnestness should have put forth its leaves, he found it barren.

The whole public life of Austria, in truth, seemed to him like a swamp in which only bubbles rise to the surface. And he would have been in utter despair had he not seen the flower of German youth burn in rage and shame concerning these things. But he looked upon life and upon the ways of these youths: and he saw them in the grasp of their professions, in the struggle over bread and brood, and saw the sighs after the greatness of the ideal fade from them. He saw them wither in unbelief and hopelessness, and abandon the destiny of a people whose greatest souls shook their heads in doubt. He saw them sink in the morass of party, bribed into those accursed organizations, and, from being deceived, grow into active dishonor. A few there were always who grew into the light. But these were lonely souls. Rarely did they teach at the once so illustrious universities of Austria; their work was poor in external reward. Working privately, they sacrificed life and happiness for some idea: one gave himself to the study of those diseases which ravage mankind most cruelly: another worked in barrenness and silence in order to give the world an unprejudiced history of the Austrians since those fateful times when they were forced from the German federation. And no reward was his except the gratitude of that new Austria, sorrowing still and

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growing, but not likely to forget him forever. And thus hundreds worked and suffered in Vienna. The city mediocrities swarmed together. But these great spirits toiled in a divine and terrible loneliness. They hewed their way through mountains of indifference.

Never were the lofty spirits of Austria so lofty, never her great minds so great, as in those last decades of the nineteenth century, when they labored without reward.

These are the things that Wigram saw, these the things that inspired him. With the great silent ones he fought, hoped, glowed for a great day that was to come.

But he could not cease watching Elisabeth with the agonizing question in his heart: Does she not hear, above the noise of the market-place, the voice of the new time? Do not her nerves feel once the immortal gleams of the dawn that is upon us? Is she lost in whom once burned so great a golden flame?

But she adventured farther and farther into the realms of "good society." There she sought such human beings as she was once, despite her sins and errors. And so she presented to Wigram the picture of genius lost in the sandy shallows of life. The picture hurt him, but it was with him in all his hours, however he sought to put it from him.

Once he fared out into the plains in order to experience again the mighty harmony of the bell of heaven, that harmony which had once raised his soul upon the Styrian hills. He wandered along the im-

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perial road near Trieste, and the wind blew from poplar to poplar, as though the trees were strings upon a harp. The snow-capped mountains were like a far blue wall of all this sunny world. There Wigram stood and thought: "It is Sunday. And up yonder a thousand human ants crawl amid the snows of eternity—the snows that stay aloft and never flow downward." He thought of Elisabeth, who had once, as proudly as the snow, pinnacled her soul upon divine heights, and who now lay under the mill-wheels of the world's common uses. He sat down by the wayside. The people who passed in motor-cars saw a tramp taking his noonday rest. But Wigram wrote:

"O youth, so full of yearning after woe,
A stream that storms unsatiated by,
Thundering toward life, and deeming far to fly—
Life curbs thee that thou into use may'st grow.

"Differently thou, O cloud, striv'st from below,
On wind-sung, everlasting heights to lie
With the eternal snow-cap silently,
And fruitless to the far herd wandering slow.

"Into the coolth, o'er mountain wall, thy gleam
Lures many restless wanderers along
Who consecrate them in thy sacred beam

"One little hour. Then, in them, earth grows strong;
Daleward they turn, glad, after briefest dream,
To mingle with the old, accustomed throng."

This Sunday crowd in whom no spark of passion
can ever glow into greatness, this crowd which jumps

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into life as boys jump into a swimming-pool, was to Wigram a constant source of sorrowful thought.

Out there on the plains he went about for days, seeking to ease his moaning heart by a creative effort. It was a strange thing to undertake in these days of noise and haste, this striving after a divine idea. He desired clarity in the eternally obscure. For the divine birth-pangs must inhere as mystery in the least of transitory things. Vainly and agonizedly this strong and sorrowful heart sought ideal ends, almost forgotten in our time.

"Our childhood's faith from us has passed away,
We are left fatherless, but nowise strong,
And know not how, our desh's desires among,
Our deeper happiness we can essay.

"Silent we stand and ask in deep dismay
For whom our hearts shall soar, our dreams shall long?
Great in our desolation, us the wrong
Corrodes of life's unblest, too brief way.

"That which seems truth discerned to ye, O wise,
Only to sacred dreamers may ye speak!
Your lofty thoughts will be the fool's blind lies.

"On him that earnestness you cannot wreak,
The noble resignation that denies
God, and yet glows a height divine to seek."

"Sorrowing that the strength I do not bear
To be as my own yearning great and pure,
I pray to Him, and bitter tears endure,
To whom my faith to look up does not dare.

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"And Him of dark reproach I cannot spare
Who cast me in this mystery's strange lure,
And hurls me back when I am most secure
To my own soul and says: Thy guilt lies there!

"Oh, that no Spirit pure illumines our dark,
To whom against that fray we cry by night
Which steepes in common day our yearning's spark!

"Oh, many prayers assault the empty light
Above which dwells no Mercy strong to mark
Our fires and quench them with eternal might.

"And yet I feel Him! If I gaze ahead,
And see afar the ineffable bright ways,
And mountains blue soar in noon's radiant haze,
I pray not—yet my arms in worship spread.

"My pulses throb, my heart aches to be led
Across Time's chasm unto the Lord of Days,
He who the pure of soul to him shall raise
And quench this battle between joy and dread.

"It cannot be that thought is ours alone,
In us creation's end; it cannot be
That we will pass like any dust or stone,

"That this wild flux, blind, mad, is all we see;
That all our yearning shall with winds be blown . . .
Ah, what a child is thine, Eternity!"

These were the aspects of Wigram's most difficult hours. In the days during which Elisabeth suffered from the life of the great world, he suffered from infinity. They were far, far apart. . . .

From the tone of Elisabeth's thrice-repeated summons he recognized the purpose for which she had

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called him. He was to see the glitter in which she lived, he was to admit the value of the glory of this world. She desired him either to recall his first refusal or to punish him with the fires which her eyes had lit in his heart. For he still loved those eyes of hers, which were sorrowful and without peace. But what would he have done in that uniformed social world? Should he have gone to have himself derided?

Rasmus alone came to him from time to time, and heard his jeremiads with a pleasing sensation of woe. For this man, who entertained no hint of tragic depths, could experience self-reproach, doubts of his own human worth, unhappy love—emotions which nearly slew Wigram—as so many rather stimulating narcotics. He played with rage and grief. He liked their sensation. And when he had been Wigram's guest for some hours, he went back to the society which he frequented, and brought thither with him a few wretched reflections of Wigram's glow and rage. But these feeble sparks seemed very wonderful to the friends of Rasmus, and gained him the reputation of a God-seeker, a world-contemner, a profound thinker.

Wigram suffered greatly under Elisabeth's call. In secret he had not ceased hoping for her impassioned soul. Some day, he thought, when worldly success had given her satiety, or even brought her sorrow, some day the great conversion would take place.

The great conversion? His faith in it was not

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strong. But he suffered for her as some earnest angel of the Most High may suffer over a soul erring upon the paths of destruction.

He returned to his work. Since all his sources of happiness had run dry, and all hope of active philosophical influence had been abandoned, he definitely turned to the thoughts of a farther shore, and gave himself up to metaphysical speculations.

He loved the plain of the South, whose immeasurable blue filled him with a foretaste of eternity and consoled him with its clouds. There in the realm of clouds was enduring, never-ending loveliness in never-ending change. And gradually he learned to look upon the fate of the woman he loved, and of the State and of humanity itself, under the symbol of this cloud-life. If a cloud changed and grew into another, what difference was there in the eternal economy? And if the Austrian Empire itself were to change and disappear like a cloud, the foundations of the universe would not be shaken. And the clouds, and the trees in the valleys that stood by pool and weir—all responded to his feeling for the oneness of nature.

Once, during such hours, he saw Elisabeth face to face. A wind was blowing in the valley, and the valley stirred and the wind played with the leaves of the willow and the silver-poplars, and a silveriness ran through the world. He was thinking whether Elisabeth would feel the loveliness about him, when, suddenly, a huge touring-car whizzed up the road, in which sat Elisabeth by the side of Ziebern. She did

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not recognize him, although she saw him. She took him for a tramp, and while he looked after her, full of terror and grief, the car thundered off. And yet she had thought of him that very morning.

It had come about in this way: In her impatience to discover some source of true joy, she had remembered a saying of Wigram's. She had once asked him what gave man the highest happiness. He had answered: "A life wholly dedicated to a great cause." "I have my art," she had answered, "and what comes next?" He had smiled and had said: "The blue distance: the far horizon."

She did not suspect the ironical meaning in his words, and thought quite simply that Wigram knew no happier hours than those spent in communion with meadow, tree, and cloud. And so she wanted to go and discover nature for herself. Perhaps there was something, after all, in these inactive, unimpassioned bushes and mountains whose language was so obscure to her. And so she set out in a motor-car. Before her lay a silvery fragrance, and into this she rode. Then emerged far, transfigured groves like happy islands, and these, too, were taken by storm. She saw little in the whole affair. Onward, onward! At the far edge of the plain the mountains glittered like opalescent milk-glass. These, too, she wanted to reach, and so she devoured the blessed distance with no aim but to conquer it, and see the essential emptiness of all these things. But the swiftness was glorious. In the mountains she en-

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joyed herself least of all. In the distance they had looked so colorful and changeful. Now their echoing walls shut out her view.

Out and back—that was all.

They took their afternoon coffee quickly. It was a weekday before the holidays, and only a few quiet people were there: no members of the great world. So there wasn't much to be seen or noted. But the forest-silence eased her nerves, and she sat longer in the sunshine than she had intended to.

But before the coming of twilight she felt the urge to go back—back to the city, which was more full of bloom to her than nature. It was full twilight when she drove through the new quarters of Vienna. In the rain-pools by the wayside the frogs croaked in concert. Behind the little gardeners' houses an orchestrelle was playing, and many-colored lanterns hung about. Elisabeth was curious and drove nearer. There was a stage, erected of rough laths, and a piece of stage-scenery with cracking colors. Obviously a company of barn-stormers would perform here to-night.

Elisabeth asked the name of to-night's piece, and the manager, with an air of shabby elegance, named a French play full of crass effects concentrated in a single part, that of a plebeian girl who makes a great marriage, and has to struggle hard in her new environment. Elisabeth knew the lines.

"When do you begin?" she asked.

"In about an hour."

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She mentioned her name and told him she would take the part for the benefit of his company. The man saw his game, and didn't hesitate for a moment. He declaimed to her all the speeches of gratitude in all the plays he knew, and Elisabeth, who recognized his quotations, shouted with laughter. Then he sent for his whole troupe, and set them to writing circulars.

UNPARALLELED OFFERING!

UNDER THE BIRNHEBEL MANAGEMENT!

First, Last, and Only Appearance of the famous TRAGÉDIENNE

ELISABETH KOETT

For the Company's Benefit.

Innumerable boys to carry the circulars out were soon at hand, and the manager gave them their directions: "You've got to hand people the circulars as if they contained an important message. They'll be grateful to you after a glance at the contents. It's a first-class ad. And yes, I almost forgot, go to the *corso* and give circulars to all the gentlemen in top-hats!"

The boys rushed off and, while Elisabeth, full of blended excitement, pity, and disgust, held a rehearsal with these strolling actors, the space in front of the stage filled itself slowly. Ziebern looked on from the wings.

The art-lovers, students, philistines, girls and officers, gossips and drummers, who had assembled, felt pretty sure at first that the whole thing was an

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impudent hoax of the manager, which would result in an exciting bit of scandal. But the manager pointed to the auto. Then a tingling, whispering excitement went through the audience. And, when the curtain rose, a number of commercial travelers from Vienna recognized Elisabeth as the genuine article and greeted her with wild applause. Others who had seen her in Vienna joined in, and in a moment the whole crowd broke out in jubilation.

And Elisabeth played the part as she had never played it before. There was much in the part for her—all her yearning for the culture, the glitter, the ease of the great world, all that she, a child of the people, adored and longed for—all was in it, and she played it all. The audience on the sward trembled with poignant sympathy. And the applause was more than applause: it was a howl, a thunder as of battle, a crashing as of torrents. It echoed from one end of the city to another. The manager kissed her hands again and again; the actors blessed her for the enormous pecuniary success, and swore to carry the story of her magnanimity to the farthest corners of the earth. Nine special policemen were ordered out to manage the crowd.

The car rolled slowly through the thundering masses. Ziebern drove, for Elisabeth's arms were full of flowers, most of which her enthusiastic admirers had stolen from the gardeners in the neighborhood. She bowed, the actors sobbed, the people howled. Then the flaming car passed out into the

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night. One moment more the receding wave of human voices drowned the cough of the motor. Then the crowning of the queen of passions was over, and the cool night air rushed past the heated car. Elisabeth pulled a mask over her face to protect her delicate skin.

She was happy, happy as she had not been for long, and moved to tears. She raised her arms high; her flowers whirled in the night air, and it seemed to her that she held—for one moment—all that she longed for to her breast. It was a love of the whole world that she felt, and the soft, billowy air seemed full of impalpable, happy forms. Her art, her great, strong art, had raised her again. Ah, if she could only have, night after night, an excited, surprised public, could always come in the guise of an unexpected gift, and always give the best that it was hers to give!

Ziebern was as intoxicated as herself. To-morrow or the next day all papers would again be full of the angelic goodness of Elisabeth, the heroine of all hearts, the well-beloved, who, with her exquisite hands, could shake and break him, too. And in this hour she was his. He had been able to carry her away from the jubilation of the crowd. He felt that he must lead her on and on—through life: lead her away from the crowd which stretched out yearning arms after her, and have her for his own.

Until now the car had sped along swiftly. Ziebern touched a lever, and it went slowly, slowly. Elis-

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abeth, lost in her dreams, did not notice it. She was once more rich and happy in her soul.

Then the car stopped.

"Is anything wrong?" she asked in a tone so friendly and carefree as if nothing untoward could possibly assail her.

"Yes," he said, his voice hoarse with passion, "something is breaking."

"What is it?"

"My heart," he said, and believed the climax worthy of a poet.

She kept still; she rather liked this tone in him.

"Elisabeth, I'm going to the devil if I have to take you back to Vienna again to-day, and see you leave this car and submerge yourself in a crowd of strangers, as you like to do. Either you promise to marry me, or we'll stay right here. I'll jump out of the car and run into the night till I burst my head open against something. I can't stand the monotonous chime in it any longer: Elisabeth, Elisabeth, Elisabeth. . . ."

"And I suppose you think it a wonderful thing to offer to make a countess of me," she said thoughtfully and coolly.

"No," he cried, "I don't. I want you to be my wife. It would be just the same if I were a common workingman. If I had taken holy orders, as my mother desired, I would have torn off my priestly robes and denied my faith for your sake. God forgive me, but it is true."

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She felt him tremble, and her thoughts became confused. His passion, the secrets of the dark night in which she saw only his silhouette—these things weakened her.

"Do say something, Elisabeth! Am I absolutely nothing to you?"

"No," she said, "I'm quite fond of you."

"And you will be my wife?"

"Perhaps it would be best."

He tore off his cap and goggles, stretched out his hands in the darkness, tore off her mask, and sought her mouth with his lips. The touch of these hot, boyish lips made her tremble, a slight feeling of passion came over her, and she returned his kisses.

The car stood like a patient monster of the underworld, throwing fiery beams from its nozzle on the dim street. Nothing was visible, not even those two whose thirst was but growing with their kisses. The dark, moonless night covered everything.

At last Elisabeth pushed him away. "Start the car," she said. "You have had more of my kisses than any other man. We must go on. Yonder rises the smoke of the city."

She pointed northwest, where glowing smoke hung in the heavens like a cloud. She loved this reflection of the giant city, and regarded it tenderly. What a life, that could set the very heavens aglow!

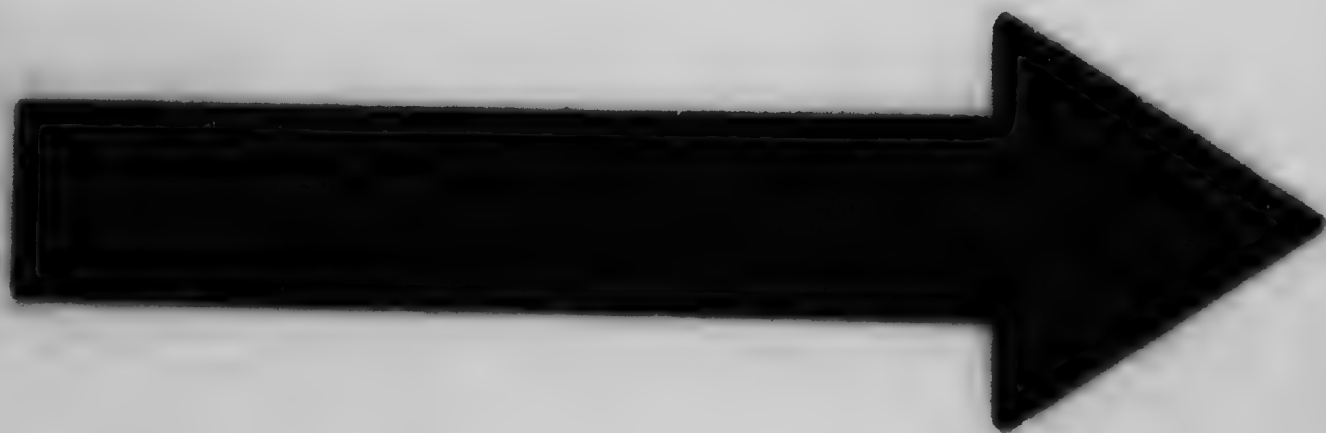
But he did not follow her glance. His knees were trembling. For this spoiled boy thought that the end of all desire would be his this very night. Twice,

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thrice, he tried to start the car. But his trembling hands refused their service. Laughingly she took his place. The motor roared, the car trembled and whirred off. In the darkness he put his arm about her. But she called out above the rattle of the car:

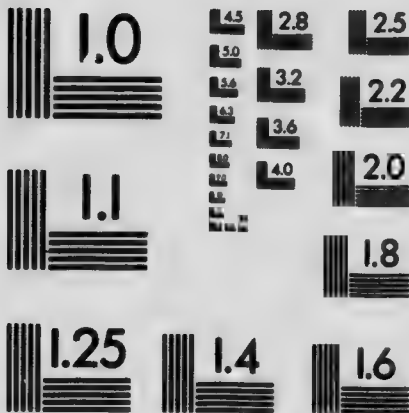
"One thing I tell you, little Severin. It is I who am doing you a favor by becoming Countess Ziebern. And you needn't try to bother me with your high and mighty folks. I make no visits. Whoever comes to me is welcome; the others——! . . ."

Severin was supremely happy and humble. He promised her everything she asked, even that their betrothal was to be a secret till their wedding-day. Elisabeth feared opposition from that great world in which she wanted so much to take her place. Ziebern's father, however, didn't object. The figure of her fortune satisfied him. Only, to prove the reality of his fickle son's love, he insisted on a delay until the coming Shrove-tide.



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XV

IN the Autumn season of this year Elisabeth played only ladies of rank, and did it with pride, restraint, and finesse. More than ever she delighted in setting the pace for that world whose enmity she feared.

In these days when only asters bloomed in the gardens and flowers were becoming expensive, Elisabeth found regularly amid the expensive gifts of her wealthy friends a little bunch of mignonette. It was poor and plain, and couldn't have cost more than ten *kreuzer*. It had the odor of childhood memories and the joys of simple folk.

But this little bunch of flowers that reappeared in her dressing-room every evening became dear to her. It was the last farewell of that rich world of poverty from which she, too, had come. Who could the giver be, she wondered. Some poor student who stood in the topmost gallery and listened, with all his impassioned soul, to her acting? She was about to assume a name that would complete the disguise, and change her, the poor child of despised people, into one of the great world's victors. And so these poor flowers gave her a deep nostalgia for her own past, for that fourth gallery which thirsts after the bless-

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edness of an intellectual heaven, and does not know the sacredness of its own desire.

And more and more frequently, at last daily, the flowers were accompanied by a few rhymed words. These verses were wholly different from the brocaded lines of the fashionable poets. For in those years all the cultured youth of Vienna wrote verse as musical, as lovely, and as severe in form as the Florentine gentlemen of the *cinquecento*.

But with these poor, simple-hearted flowers, came hovering to her such verses as these:

"O happy floweret
That near to thee,
Not in a vessel set,
Blessed may be.
Let its poor blossom
Die on thy bosom,
Near—near to thee. . . ."

But in these rhymes, out at elbows and heels perhaps, Elisabeth felt the trembling of a warm, tender, shy soul, and its young love. He who sent the verses must have felt a peculiar magic in the mignonettes. For he never sent cheap violets instead. With one little bunch came this poem:

"Flowers I give thee
That are the loveliest.
Poor as my life they be,
Yet in the rose's tree
No sweeter odors rest.

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"I do not strive for thee;
A child I stand confest.
Yet what would roses be
To flowers I give to thee
That are the loveliest."

Sometimes he threw words on paper which were scarcely verses. It was more of a letter, a sigh:

"Thy world lies a-dawning,
I count the clouds for thee;
For thee the dew-wind sings,
And the storm cries for me.
Thou swayest in life and motion,
All things leave me alone,
Like a stone on a lonely barren
In the light of a lifeless sun."

One Sunday he was at Greifenstein, and from there he sent her an illustrated postcard. He must have been in a lofty mood that day, for he wrote:

"The heaven is azure,
The dancing waves beam;
My heart is thy true heart
My happy eyes gleam.
Lilacs in all gardens
And shadowy rest
Are thine, like the lyrics
That sing in my breast.
And if thou shouldst hate me
As noonday hates night,
I could not believe it—
Too golden the light."

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Next day he had returned to Vienna, and had seen her at the theater. So he called out to her:

"All the day, all the night
I am with thee,
Of thee my dreams are bright
Though far I be.
Laughter and tears one breath
Are when I hear thee;
Ah, I awake from death
When I am near thee."

The verses were childish, but they were so full of love.

At that time the visit of the young Queen of Holland was fresh in the memory of all the Viennese. He caught up its suggestiveness:

"If thou wert of the Lowlands
The beautiful young queen,
My glory and my ardor
For thee the same had been.
The world must be my captive
Else I can know no rest,
And the whole world's dear queen shall be
The ending of my quest."

If for some days she did not appear, and he could not see her, he would take the time to write more finished verses. She gathered them all and loved them. When her mail was brought in she sought first the envelope of cheap paper with his unformed handwriting on it. And his song would complain of the days on which he had not been able to see her:

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"Thou knowest not the dreariness
Without thee to awake:
Then is my soul companionless,
Peace cannot come to sooth or bless
My heart's unending ache.

"Laughter and sunshine, though so fair,
My life to weeping turn.
And the dear birds in the blue air
With singing make my heart aware
Of how a heart can yearn.

"If I could, like the black-bird, fly,
I'd sing an evensong
Above thee where the shadows lie,
Till thou shouldst weep as bitterly
As I, from love's dear wrong."

And so it went on, and the warmth and vitality and naturalness of the boy were so infectious that Elisabeth began to wonder how he would look. Surely he was half a child. But then again he expressed a depthless melancholy which changed her image of him:

"Forlornness all about me here;
My heart's cry sounds too late,
Like a bird's piping in the drear
Snow forest disconsolate.

"In field and wood I am alone,
Alone at every tide,
Is there in all the world no one
Who would with me abide?

"My soul is still and gray is the sky,
No other soul will heed my cry.
My heart is buried, senseless and still,
Because there is one may not do my will.

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"Past is the Lord's day,
Monday flies away—
Time passes on and on—
Work brings no pain,
Joy brings no gain,
For the want of one . . . of one . . ."

He must be a mechanic, she thought, a joyless worker with a deep heart full of love. For this poem was a folk-song.

She would have liked to see him and talk to him, but she was a little afraid. What was she to do with the poor fellow? His love was touching: hers would have been ridiculous. And Heaven forbid that she play the part of destructive fate in his poor, oppressed life. That was all very well with her smooth gentlemen, who were far too cool and sophisticated to let anything be a matter of life and death.

One evening, however, she went out into the open before the beginning of the performance, and a young fellow, carrying a little bunch of mignonette, ran into her. He was so taken aback, so ashamed and frightened at having been discovered, that she had to speak to him to save him from utter wretchedness.

To be quite sure she asked:

"Are those my flowers?"

"Yes," he said hastily, and held them out to her like a boy who is in a hurry, like a breathless child.

"And you have no poem for me?"

"Yes, yes. . ." and he took the paper from the pocket over his heart.

She walked on, reading the verses. He went half

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beside, half behind her, his hat devoutly in his hands,
like a poor suppliant.

"Because I speak in song
Less true it cannot be,
That I to thee belong
Unchangeably.

"Naught is in me but woos thee,—
My sorrow and my sighs;
There is no little flower
But for thee dies.

"Passes no single day
But my heart dreams to stay
With thee and mourns alway.

"Long ere the dawn is here
I weep a bitter tear
For thy sake, dear.

"Soon so far, late so far
Till my joy lost must be;
Morning-star, evening-star;
Were I with thee!"

"Well," she said gently, "so we have met. Did you think it this morning?"

"Oh no, never!"

"And now introduce yourself to me, won't you?"

"Yes, of course. I am Peter Strehl, and my name is engraver . . . I mean. . . . My name is Peter Strehl."

"Peter Strehl?" she said kindly and looked at him.

He was worth looking at, to be sure, with his handsome, wild young face, and simply combed hair. The

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faithful eyes stood under finely shaped brows; the nose projected boldly. He was beardless and had something of the defiance of boyhood in his expression. He couldn't have been over twenty.

"But you're a poet, too?" she asked.

"Yes, that too," he said, confused, for he was not accustomed to be addressed by such titles. "But one can't live on that."

"And do you like to engrave?"

"Oh, well enough."

"And what do you prefer to engrave?"

"Ah, gracious lady," he said simply, "your name."

"Ah," she warned him, "such things you may only write. But wait: if you are indeed a poet, chance shall not have arranged this meeting in vain. Do you think you could write something acceptable for the stage?"

"Yes, oh yes," he cried happily.

"I must go to the theater now," she said. "But you might come to see me some Sunday about the noon hour, after rehearsal. Perhaps you have something already."

"I don't know yet . . ." he hesitated.

"But you're coming?"

"Ah yes, with all my heart!"

"Well, then, good-by. Let me see: your name is Peter Strehl. That's a name that ought to sound well. Good-by, dear poet."

She went to the theater, and poor Peter ran

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through lonely streets. He sobbed, he sighed, he cried out, he composed a drama and two lyrics in fragments before the performance began.

He stood again in his high station and looked down to where Elisabeth waved her glittering fan, ruled over the stage, and feigned, with so compelling a magic, love and unfaith and sin. And his soul stormed about the theater like a haughty bird: "I am nearer to her than all you others who adore her."

At the end of each act she bowed five or six times toward the boxes in recognition of the resonant applause. But once she raised her beautiful, happy eyes to the gallery, which at once thundered and rattled under their glory.

But Peter Strehl stood like one apotheosized.

"She looked up here for my sake. While the stormy love of a thousand hearts assailed her, she thought of me . . . of me! O thou greatest, loveliest, sweetest Elisabeth. . . ."

The very next Sunday he called on her. Since his great desire to be a creative artist had not yet been wholly realized, he contented himself for the moment with the purchase of a broad-brimmed plush hat of such size that he had to hold it constantly lest the wind seize it. Its flapping brim and a flowing artist's tie stood him, for the time, in lieu of fame. And, indeed, he carried these two bits of apparel to Elisabeth with much greater assurance than himself and his talent.

Elisabeth had him ushered into her reception-room.

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The furnishings of this room were radically different from his preconceived notion of the looks of such a place. Nothing was to be seen here of the usual array of little follies that actresses are wont to have. The walls were draped in light-blue silk, and even the whiteness of the ceiling had a bluish tinge. The furniture was of golden-brown, polished wood—severely simple in form. One wall was taken up along its whole extent by a bench-like divan, and over it hung the portraits of the immortal dead. Elisabeth had thought of keeping herself strong and pure by the contemplation of the features of Dante, Shakespeare, Beethoven, Goethe—men who had permitted nothing to deflect them from their earnest service of art.

But gradually, as Elisabeth found more and more pleasure in the goods of the fleeting day, she tried to justify this taste in herself as partaking also, in a measure, of the unalterable good of life. She scarcely glanced at the great pictures on the other wall. The three remaining ones were covered with the presents of the passing hour. There were pictures of archdukes, of ministers of state, of the bearers of noble names or heavy purses. There were sketches in oil, in water-color, in pastel, whose only value lay in the names signed in one corner.

Strehl, who had come in trembling with trepidation, looked about him, and then turned instinctively from the three walls of gew-gaws toward the pictures of the eternal masters, who exalted and humbled him at once. When Elisabeth entered he was already

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strengthened, his knees trembled no longer, although he made her a deep bow.

With quiet friendliness she invited him to take a seat beside her on the sofa, and he took his seat near the glimmering folds of her silk dress, like a soul fresh come to heaven and benumbed with happiness.

"So you have plays there? But, Heavens, Peter Strehl, so many. Hm! *Brutus*: five acts; *Caligula*: a prologue and six acts. Don't you know that nowadays classical subjects are confined to the contemplation of college students? And this? Ah yes—*The Distillery Strike*! And it's not a comedy either?"

"No," said the young engraver timidly, "it is a social tragedy. In it the devil of drink breaks down all the elements of nobility and greatness in the striking workers."

"And haven't you anything for me?"

"Oh," he said, and his eyes gleamed, "I'll write something special for you, something deep, glowing, sweet, and wicked—like yourself."

She smiled and ran her eyes over the plays, reading bits here and there. Silent with anxiety and love he sat beside her and dared hardly to look his fill upon hair and throat and profile. His happiness chimed in him like the sound of bells, and he held himself as erect as a church-spire. He almost crushed his beautiful hat with his twitching hands.

"Ah, Peter Strehl," she said suddenly, "winning as your honesty and naïveté are in lyric work, they

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will help you little here. Everything here is far too plain and simple. The modern dramatist must be sophisticated, repressed! You have no idea how subtle our public is. Have you read the better French dramatists? Or Ibsen? He, as a Teuton, would be nearer you in spirit."

"Ibsen? I haven't read him. But I've seen you as Hedda and Nora."

"Ah, then read him. And read as suspiciously as a detective, consider each word as if you were a diplomat, seek a hidden significance in every commonplace. You will then see the secretiveness of our time. Here is my Ibsen. There are three or four dramas in each of the volumes. Will you study these volumes before you go at a play?"

"Oh, how gladly!"

"And, in the meantime, can you tell me the plan of your other play and what part there is in it for me."

"Yes, to be sure. There is first——"

"One moment," she interrupted him. "What we're starting at now is a game: no more. In the course of that game you are to learn to be a playwright. Do not hope that your first piece will be put on. It will be wholly unadaptable. But you may learn and succeed with your third or fourth. On the condition, then, that I am at liberty to refuse anything and everything, we may go to work together. Do you agree?"

"Yes," he said humbly, "I'm satisfied with every-

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thing, if only I can be near you, and may hope to please you some day. But my new scenario is so compelling that, perhaps——”

“Well, Heaven grant it. Tell me about it!”

“It is,” said young Strehl; “the old legend of the Singing Bone, of that song of lamentation played upon a flute made of the bone of a murdered princess. Two sisters, you see, love a certain prince. One of the two is a deep soul, silent, passionate, and proud; the other is sweet, yielding, cheerful. The prince prefers the second girl. But the older sister is his betrothed. She sees love and greatness fall before the shamefulness of being scorned. She slays her sister.”

“Ah,” said Elisabeth, “you would have to manage that part of the action most subtly, in order to make it socially possible, and not too coarse. There’s danger right there; but go on.”

“It only takes up one act. It’s really the exposition of previous happenings. The tragedy comes later—the tragedy of an evil conscience. All the other acts are filled with the fear of the discovery of the crime. This strong woman fights against remorse and fear. But she grows wearier, sicker, more pitiable. At last, wholly broken, she betrays herself.”

“Ah,” said Elisabeth, “that sounds promising. But how does the Lamenting Song of the legend enter your plot. For you don’t seem to be planning a fairy-play simply?”

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"The Lamenting Song is the eternally watchful curiosity of a poor fool who loved the dead girl dearly, who suspects the murder, and with that song tortures the nerves of the victorious criminal. He it is who always stings anew her fear, and her remorse, and finally breaks down her will and her resistance."

"Yes, that is realistic," said Elisabeth. "Fear of discovery is a strong dramatic motive. It makes of the audience fellow-criminals. That, at least, is new. I believe that, so far, no tragedy of evil conscience and remorse has been written. Yes, you must try that. Now go, for I'm expecting people. But you must become a great, great poet."

She held out both hands to him, and the poor fellow, holding his hat in one hand and his manuscripts in the other, pressed hers as best he could, and then stumbled out. Not till he was on the stairs did his heart cry out: "Oh, why didn't I kiss those exquisite hands? Oh, why didn't I drop everything and grasp the glory that was offered me. Those divine hands were held out to me to be kissed—and I, fool that I am, didn't kiss them. Heaven stood open, and I passed by its gate. For one moment her fragrance, her pallor, her nerves, could have been mine, and I, accursed fool,—ran away!"

He hastened to his little room in order to work, but it was a long time before he could begin. He would have given a limb to have had that chance to kiss her hands repeat itself.

Elisabeth, however, stood still in the middle of the

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room whence she had dismissed him. She was really expecting no one. She was deeply moved by the awkwardness of this poor fellow—half-artist, half-artisan—who could hide neither quality, and still less the force of his unconquerable love.

She, to whom life presented itself in such smooth and perfect guises,—she was strangely held by the heartrending magic of the first awkward, helpless, stormy love of a remarkable young life. She was sorry that she had spoken to him with such coolness and hardness and reserve. He was younger than herself, and paid a devout respect to her words. She had driven him away like a frightened child, whom she should rather have petted and consoled.

Angrily she turned on her heel. She thought of Hameler and of the ironic drawl which would be his: "Why, yes: birds of a feather! She, after all, is a child of the society of the celluloid collar. She has a taste for plebeians. Eh?"

And another thing: scarcely was she Ziebern's betrothed, but she had to be thinking of another man. Where was that to end?

But the more anxiously she tried to root out of her heart this "partiality for the fourth gallery," and the more she derided herself, the greater grew her secret tenderness for this poor boy, whose kingdom was not of this world, and whose love of her made him commit an action which no passion could have wrung from her fine friends—it made him stumble over his own feet! She laughed at him, and thought

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of him. Sometimes she was frightened. Would the great love come to her from this source? That would be shockingly inconvenient, nay, impossible. The fourth gallery would have to be eliminated.

At the theater she didn't let her eyes follow her heart. This often made Peter Strehl very unhappy, but he consumed himself with work on his play. For this play was, so he imagined, to reverse their parts. Before its greatness she should know a sweet humility, she would lose her head, and be timid. Thus would he have her, and thus love her.

He read Ibsen with immense zeal. But he was born of the hungry and positive soul of the people. He wanted action: the great primitive passions of love and hate and death-dealing revenge. Hence he read the great Norseman's plays as though they were reports of illness—symptom-sheets—and he could take pleasure only in those passages where the fable asserted its right. *An Enemy of the People* was the only one of Ibsen's later plays that he cared about: his real liking he gave to the *Crown Pretendants*, *The Norland Expedition*, and *Lady Inger of Östråt*.

"Ha," he thought to himself, "surely I can do better than that!"

And so he began to forge the action of his play. The scene was to be an island or cape of the far North, probably one of the Faroë islands. It would look like the island realm of the king of Thule with a mighty castle by the sea. The time of the action

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would be the ninth century, which seemed to Strehl an age rich in dim presages. The heroine's name was Oddrun, her sister's Gyda, the prince was called Magnus, and the passionate fool Olaf Hukkr.

On the very Sunday of his visit to Elisabeth he began to work. He had the fool climb a steep eminence behind the scene, upon the invisible side of the castle, at whose foot surged the ice-gray sea. The fool has descended from the awful cliffs with flowers for Gyda. Thus the first human being who had risked his life there had done it to gather a few forlorn blossoms for a sweet young lass.

Monday, in the engraver's shop, the action of the play brewed in Strehl's heart. It lay like a nightmare upon him. His hand grasped thoughtlessly the engraver's tool, but in him the thunderous mood did not die out. Many times he took up his pencil and wrote on scraps and edges of paper. And this momentary work, taken from his employer's time, had a strange sweetness, and there was no happiness in all Vienna like the secretly intoxicating thought of the young engraver.

He felt that his play would be Shakespearean in quality—this play that he was etching upon bits of paper.

Oddrun, for instance, who sees the amber gleam of love flicker up between Magnus and Gyda, appears to observe nothing. Apparently she was unfeeling, stone-still, adream. Thus she passes by the growing acts of unfaith, and not even Gyda's betrothed can

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urge her wrath against the prince. "She is as void of feeling, as indifferent, as water: she flows into any vessel." Thus she is characterized at this point of the action.

But dreadful things prepare themselves cumulatively in her. She is aware of the menaces in her own soul, and shudders at them. She asks the huntsman concerning the nature of slaughter. Whether he was sorry for the first doe pierced by his spear? Whether he had ever slain aught human? Whether there be a difference in the end of beast and man? Whether the dead return and live a dreadful life in the consciousness of the living? . . .

With secret hesitation, slowly, murkily, she asks all these questions, and her mounting hatred of Gyda is scarce perceptible in an involuntary twitching of the hands as she dresses her sister in festive array. For her hatred comes like a cloud by night, visible only to solitary watchers.

In the longest night of Summer, in an arbor upon the topmost cliff, Gyda, softly singing, awaits her prince. Oddrun appears and stares at her. Slowly speaking, she forces the lass to the edge of the cliff, slowly the flame of her hatred flares, and before fear arises in Gyda's heart, the edge of doom holds but a single figure. . . . Deep down the roaring of the sea drowns one last cry. . . . The prince finds the arbor empty.

No one knows how Gyda has come to her end. But Oddrun's father believes that Magnus has played

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false, has betrayed Gyda, and driven her to her death. He leaves the castle, a silent vengeance in his heart. Oddrun remains with Magnus. She helps him bear his sorrow, and becomes his wife, solitary, honored, scarcely loved. Silently, quietly, she wears the blood-flecked crown.

Only the fool suspects. From the waves of the sea he has saved Gyda's little harp, which he keeps. He sinks into depths of half-mad brooding. One thing sustains his will: the waiting for any breath of betrayal on Oddrun's part.

Gyda is lost in the depths of the sea, but her harp lives, and the songs that sounded sweetly upon her lips, now float like wraiths from the mouth of the fool through the moaning of the windy castle. And these songs corrode the soul of Oddrun as, in the old Norland legend, the iron worms gnaw at the Viking's sword. Her soul grows brittle as wood that the ants have attacked. One blow and it is dust.

The prince commands the fool to cease from his dread singing. But the fool can still creep about Oddrun and torture her with the crouching sorrow in his eyes. And the prince was loth to destroy Gyda's harp: he commands the fool to hide it. But the fool places the harp upon the extreme height of a perilous tower, whence none dare bring it down. Now the wind of the sea sings in the harp, and in all silent hours its strings moan like a crying child about the tower. But in the storm-nights the harp cries, and groans, and thunders like an angry soul.

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Oddrun listens and may not speak, for her hatred of the harp would betray her hatred of Gyda. A gnawing song destroys her soul; her nerves begin to know strange quivers, and her brain acquires strange powers: it sees externalized that which is within.

And thus in the night time she drags herself to the hall in which the crown is lying, and in the sharp, thin moonlight sits Gyda's shadow, holding the crown. Oddrun calls to the shadow, but it wavers and disappears in a phosphorescent glow. She cries out for the servants, for lights, for a hundred torches. No column shall throw its shadow; she fears darkness lurking in any spot. She has Gyda sought for. There must be, she thinks, the trail of a drenched robe to the table on which lies the crown. But nothing is found, and at last she remains alone in the flaming hall. And her agony towers to ineffable heights the while the hundred torches flare and quiver and throw sparks as though the world were aflame.

She hurls herself down before the image of the Crucified: she prays for grace, for peace in life or death: "Give me a sign!" she cries in the delirium of her agony, "a sign, or I will break your outstretched arms."

But while her blasphemous arms approach the arms of the Crucified, a bugle-tone shrills through the hall. She sinks down, wearied to death. But she breathes again. It is her father who has come to set the crooked straight.

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But the father comes to slay. Under the guise of reconciliation he had disarmed the prince, and has handed him a cup of poison. Now all she loved and all she hated are dead. Then Oddrun approaches with a sacred dignity the form of him she loved more than his crown, and takes the poisoned cup into her hand. Her voice sounds clear and sweet as she confesses everything, and thus achieves the liberation of her soul. More and more mightily swell the deep tones of her voice as she proclaims the message of her sin and her redemption. Hers is a song, jubilant with guilt, crime, sorrow, expiation. The gray halls resound as she drinks the draught of death.

Young Strehl had been bold enough to let Oddrun's last utterance be a stormy "Ah!" expressing the supreme moment of her soul's liberation. For Elisabeth had in her throat a cry that was also a song. And with this cry she was to break down in death.

Such was his play. It was strong as youth, mighty as his ambition, and full of genius. It was profoundly moving, and, indeed, torturing: it was compelling and redeeming in its effect. The action either crouched in a horror of presentiment, or else it roared and crashed. It was the strong note of an earlier civilization, for Peter Strehl had not yet passed through the nerve-racking school of modernity. Nor did he seek to compare his work to the analytical quiescence of those modern poets whom he contemned. He compared it to Shakespeare, to Æschylus, to Sophocles.

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His happiness was as tameless as though he had found the fountain of immortal thoughts. And when, at night, in his little room, he had written the last cry of Oddrun, he sank down and wept for joy. For he believed that God had given him the immortal voice of the great men of ancient days. Like them, he was pure and strong and impassioned. The quiver of their light sprang equally from the cloud of his soul. And he was grateful.

Not until then did he think, with a streaming joy, of Elisabeth, to whose full stature he had now grown. Nothing now could make him less, and she could be his: the great tragic actress could be the great poet's equal wife. What a union, full of beauty and light, She would make his works live, she would carry his name to the ends of the earth, and then she would give him her hand in token of the double union of body and soul. How they would work together and reach ever loftier heights.

Then he copied his work that had been written on so many bits of paper, and from time to time cried out because he had himself forgotten so many glorious passages. And this beautiful, clear copy he brought her, solemnly, like one enskied.

She took his work and was moved by the words of love which, in the consciousness of his greatness, he now dared to utter. . . . She listened to these words as to music that one knows and loves.

"Ah," she smiled, "I may not love you."

"You may, Elisabeth. For I have entered the

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realm of your greatness. Do not say no. Wait, wait! When the first performance of this work has flared up in a storm of all hearts—then say no, if you can!”

“Dear God, what a child you are, what a dreamy child!”

She didn't know what to do with so much young, blind faith. She saw his eyes gleam with the glory of the future as he saw it, and the thought of the dread agony which the shattering of these boyish hopes would cause, made her desperate.

She sought to counsel a more prudent expectation. He waved her advice aside. She spoke of megalomania; he said: “First read it!”

She complained of how she, being fond of him, would have to share the agony of his fall from Heaven.

“The greater will be your reward, Elisabeth, when you see the truth!”

His childlikeness maddened her with a kind of divine despair.

“Nothing will come true of all you dream,” she cried between tears and laughter; “you will not be a great poet for years and years, and perhaps never, or only through the bitter learning of a thousand lessons. You will be nothing, my poor boy, but the little engraver with his wild yearning, and his big hat and his boy's face in which I can't bear to see suffering! Nothing will come true for you, my dreamer, except—my love.”

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She put her arms about him whom the wonder of her unbelief and of his happiness made dizzy, and kissed him on the lips. Then flamed up in him all the tameless, waiting love, and he kissed all that beauty for which, under the chandeliers of night, a thousand lips yearned in vain.

"Hold me tight," he cried, "hold me that I may feel your love is a reality." And he felt with wonder how the sinews of her supple arms strained against his body, and how her pallid fingers interlaced about his throat. He waited till she had exerted her power. Then he pressed her until her breath failed under his young strength.

They kissed each other from nightfall until dawn; they struggled in the throes of their passion as with death. And no satiety came to them who were insatiable of each other.

Morning came. Trembling with a thousand kisses, he left her. She looked after him with tenderness and sorrow.

"What a child he is, what a stormy, awkward, tender child, full of devotion, of love, of health and strength and youth! And yet so ignorant and foolish in all the ways of life. And so poor and ridiculous, and of such low estate! Ah, that I were able to honor, to esteem him!"

And she burst out into ripples of merry laughter at the thought of honoring poor little Peter Strehl!

Then she began to reflect and was dissatisfied, as always. Was this the great love of life? And what

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if he were right and were a genius? What if his work did rise above the work of his contemporaries?

She took up his manuscript, full of curiosity, and looked into it. But after a moment she said wearily, satiatedly: "Heavens, how silly! That's just like him. No wonder. Genius doesn't grow so easily in a factory. Ninth century! Why, hardly the biggest men dare do such a thing to-day if they want more than six performances for their stuff! I suppose I'm to rig myself up like Isolde in the opera. And the North, with its trite costuming. 'Her sister is cast over a cliff into the sea.' What bosh! I suppose he thinks it highly tragic! And at the end a general poison-party and corpse-parade, which the public will feel very much like asking this one remaining poet to join. Oh, Peter Streh! Peter Streh!"

She put the manuscript on a bookcase and stretched out her arms.

"Moral *katzenjammer*!"

She threw a last disgusted look at the pages, and then dragged herself where they couldn't be seen. "Requiescat. . . . Now I have to make the foolish boy comprehend that he is a foolish boy. I don't know who's more to be pitied: he or I. . . .

"Poor little fellow!"

XVI

At the end of but three days Peter Strehl came, in festive guise, to ask after his play. She said: "A good thing takes time. . . ." She didn't have the courage to tell him what she really thought, and, furthermore, she intended to fortify her judgment by that of one of her friends, say, Hameler. The latter's opinion she intended then, with a nice sugar-coat, to produce as her own.

He was hopeful and without any presentiment. Although she confessed that she had looked into the play and had found the time and place of the action difficult and ungrateful, he was not to be shaken in his wonderful confidence. He contradicted her flatly:

"The setting of a dim antiquity, the old, echoing castle by the sea, serve to give the fable an even higher significance."

So the conversation flagged. She kissed him a few times out of sheer pity, and then considered how, by some kindly method, she could get him to go, and, indeed, could rid herself of him definitely.

In regard to lovers whom she desired to dismiss and who might, conceivably, balk at their dismissal, Elisabeth had invented two well-systematized methods—the ether method and the insect method.

The ether method was gentle, and was meant for

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sensitive souls, who were easily hurt. In applying it she became, as far as the pursuer was concerned, utterly invisible. She melted into thin air. She wasn't at home; letters addressed to her might have been written to a ghost. She ceased to exist. The meaning of these tactics couldn't well be misunderstood.

But if the discarded gentleman was of an energetic turn, if he penetrated her dwelling or awaited her on the street, then, like the insect who feigns death, she let him beg, threaten, rage, weep, and waited nothing but an opportunity to slip away. Hiller had had to receive the second and severer treatment. He had been noisy as a hailstorm on glass-roofing. Hameler, on the other hand, though he didn't wish to believe in the finality of his dismissal either, soon caught on to the ether method and withdrew quietly until Elisabeth instated him as a mere friend, whom one couldn't very well go on avoiding socially.

To-day it was easy enough to put off Peter Strehl with a few excuses. He called her beloved and betrothed. The first epithet merely filled her with sadness: she would like to have been that if only he had been a more considerable personality. The word "betrothed," on the other hand, made her twitch nervously. Yes, yes: the ether system would have to begin. In a short time the banns of her marriage to Ziebern would be published, and this poor mechanic's delusion might give rise to a pretty scandal.

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When he was gone she considered how the necessary spiritual operation could be least painfully effected. There was no need really to give the play to Hameler. She would only be losing time and gaining a witness to her folly. Strehl would have to become sensible quickly. So she would hand in the play to her manager, and ask him in confidence to return it to Herr Strehl in the course of a month, with some such note as this: "Although I find it extremely painful to deny anything to our great artist Elisabeth Koett, I find, upon reading your play, that its unmodern inscenation, etc., renders it totally unfit, etc. Hence I am forced, with whatever regret, etc." Yes, that would do.

Finally, it was most advisable that, prior to her marriage, she test the carrying power of her fame by going on the road for an extended period.

In her nervousness she was accustomed to follow any determination by overhasty action. Hence she rode at once to her manager, forgetting the manuscript of Strehl's play, and arranged for leave of absence. Then she sent telegrams to various agents, making a number of out-of-town engagements. She awaited the beginning of her tour in a fashionable suburb, whither Ziebern followed her. They lived in different hotels, met only at meals, and presented to the world an unexceptionable example of propriety.

Peter Strehl, in the meantime, had received a farewell postcard. She, Elisabeth (so she put it) had been suddenly surprised by offers to go on tour. In

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the meantime she had handed his play to her manager. He would receive an answer in about three weeks, but she could hold out no great hopes. Good-by.

Strehl smiled his beatitude. If his mistress, who was accustomed to command her managers, recommended a play, why, it was as good as accepted. In quiet confidence he awaited the date of his triumph. There was no mistrust in his heart toward her who had been so great, so strong, so glowing. The Koett was passionate, but frank. That had been the common report. And he believed in her as only love, love of a woman that has been utterly sealed, *can* believe.

She had given herself to him, and now he offered to marry her. Was she not forced to marry the man to whom she had given her honor? And he would marry her, however famous he was. The only thing that grieved him was her absence, and the longing for her—so lovely and so desired—grew into many beautiful verses.

One of his fellow-workmen, at this time, came upon a sheet of paper with some verses headed: "To Elisabeth." He teased Peter Strehl, and began to sing the old popular song:

"O you Elisabeth,
You are so big and fat. . . ."

The pure and fiery poet cut off the music with a thoroughly felt ear-box, and quieted the excitement of

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the whole shop by the declaration that he would take no jokes on the subject of his betrothed.

This explanation satisfied even him who had been struck, for, though these simple souls had no respect for love, they did have a certain amount for marriage.

Strehl and his former enemy were reconciled easily enough, for in these circles a blow is not a deadly matter. Indeed, the might of the blow had excited the curiosity of the other engraver, and he walked home with Strehl, asking him intimate questions. Strehl contented himself with saying that his betrothed was a great lady. It did him good to say that. His friend was at first incredulous, and so Peter, who rather regretted his indiscretion, asked him to consider the information a merry jest. He assumed the same attitude in the workshop, which only made the other men believe more thoroughly in his fortune. And so they rather avoided him, holding him to be an adventurer, a bourgeois, a contemner of labor. That explained his poetizing, too.

So Peter Strehl became isolated. He was too young to bear it lightly. But he thought of Elisabeth, and hoped and waited.

In the meantime Elisabeth sought an impresario for her tour. Half seriously, half laughingly, Rasmussen, the ever-flexible, offered himself for the position. He had to give up his position with Ziebern to her, he asserted, and so it would be nice if she would engage him. He assured her that he was a master of

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the art of advertising. Elisabeth laughed, but agreed to give him a trial. So Rasmus started off to Brünn, Prague, and into Bavaria. His enthusiastic conviction of Elisabeth's incomparableness impressed the newspapers, and he wrote such charming articles about her everywhere that the hearts of the great masses were moved to tingling expectation, even as Ziebern's heart had once been.

He knew how to treat all men, and how to make the most profitable agreements: he surpassed Elisabeth's agents in subtle skill, and showed a remarkable talent for his new calling.

Elisabeth, grown serious now, engaged him permanently, and Rasmus's life had a content that engaged his enthusiasm. And these two people really fitted well together. Rasmus's light love for her had long been changed to a thorough study of the surprises and the beauties of her art. Now he could be to her what the stamp is to the coin, what success is to talent. He belonged necessarily to her genius.

She compelled all the thousands before whom she appeared by the old magic of terror and of love. But he had hypnotized these thousands first, and had given them a voice. He invented the inevitable expression for the effects of her art, saved the critics the trouble of thinking, wrote admirable, tingling articles himself, trained the chiefs of the *clagues* to achieve the most delicate effects in the proper places, and surrounded Elisabeth with a sacred legend: She knew all the dæmonic sorrow of one who desires to

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love and cannot. This legend satisfied all souls, without cooling off the male world. Indeed, the fable that this beautiful, unhappy woman was still seeking her conqueror filled thousands of idle heads with an attractive and alluring dream.

Hitherto not only in Vienna, but wherever Elisabeth's fame had gone, the great question had been: Whom does she hold? Who holds her? What is there behind all this secretiveness? Each one supposed another lover, and each denied the notions of each. Now a great, sensational sigh of enlightened relief went up. She is still seeking.

And now, at the time of her greatest foreign triumphs, the report of her betrothal to Ziebern spread abroad. But no one believed that she considered him a finality. The few hundred people who knew of the engagement, knew the bridegroom, too. Another step upwards, they said, and spoke of Ziebern as though he were a footstool.

Rasmus sent accounts of Elisabeth's transporting might to all the home papers in order that a second tour through the Austrian provinces might be paved with gold in advance. And soon people came from all the little towns to Vienna only to see this magical woman of whom all poets dreamed.

The poems that were written about or to Elisabeth were gathered by Rasmus, and he knew how to make most skillful use of them. In fact, young lyrists came to regard Elisabeth as a grateful subject, for they were sure to see their verses in print. So they

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carried their poems to Rasmus—poems that had often had as their original inspiration some Emmy or Mary Ann.

When Elisabeth returned to Vienna, she was received, as Rasmus had prearranged, with anxiety and timidity. He had flourished every offer she had had as a danger-signal that Vienna might lose its treasure.

The tremendous applause of her audiences was now, at the same time, their congratulations on that approaching marriage which would make a countess of Elisabeth. One of the sharpest tongues in Vienna was heard to say: "In the shape of that ass Ziebern, society seems to have given her a golden fleece." For now, at her return, all papers announced her marriage and its date.

Thus the information which had, shortly before, been the exclusive possession of a few, now spread to all classes. It penetrated the workshops. But then, Peter Strehl had only to look at the papers to learn what Elisabeth had done.

A cold death-sweat broke out on all his limbs, and his living body felt, without the mercy of a waning consciousness, the authentic agony of death. Behind his forehead something grew into stone. He nerved himself to but a single deed. He sent a laconic telegram: "Elisabeth, is it true? Strehl." And he waited, silent and petrified, in his nameless love.

But Elisabeth applied her ether system. Only she went straight to the manager. The enraged proletarian might break loose and find a flail, and thunder

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down upon all men in his madness. This was no time for mercy. He had to be paralyzed, crushed, exterminated, before he could draw breath to cry out.

"Have you sent back that engraver's play?" Elisabeth asked the manager.

"No." He had forgotten all about it. "I haven't read it yet."

"He worries me about it," she declared. "Send it back to him, dear friend, and tell him that he has no talent, and might as well give it up."

The manager used the occasion to offer his congratulations to the future countess, and had the manuscript sought for one solid hour. In vain, of course. Then he dictated a letter, taking the bull by the horns.

"The manuscript of the drama *Ortrud*"—he turned to his secretary: "That's the name of the stuff, isn't it?"—"which we are returning under another cover, has been read by all our readers, who agree that it is crass in its effects, old-fashioned, and coarse in aim. Hence—in agreement with your kind patroness—I may urge you to study the life and the art of our own day before you seek to engage the attention of the management for a new work——"—"and so on. Please fix it up, my dear fellow, and tell him to have the kindness to spare us in future." That was the manager's last word.

Strehl received only his letter. Had the manuscript been lost in transmission? Of course. Misfortunes never come singly. . . .

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Moreover, he believed every word in the manager's letter, even the statement that he had no talent. With that stony pressure on the back of his brain, which seemed ready to burst his skull, and rose now and then into waves of fiery agony, he went over the bits of paper that held the rough draught of his play. He was convinced: it was crude and foolish, good enough for some troupe of barn-stormers in a seventh-rate watering-place.

He was as worthless as Elisabeth. Or else Elisabeth had realized what a creature he was, and was frightfully ashamed of the one night of which he, like a common sharper, had cheated her.

Or she was a hussy, like all theatrical women. But it didn't really matter to him which of these explanations covered the case. Reflection was superfluous. It was equally superfluous that a worm like himself, whose head had been thoroughly crushed by a passing heel, should make any ado in the shape of wriggling and quivering.

He wanted, immensely, to go to sleep—for good; and the one notion that crept about in the petrified convolutions of his brain was: cheaply and quickly.

So he took a rope and went to the *Prater*, wearily climbed a tree, and tied one end of the rope to a branch, the other to his neck. It was far out in a little vale, where few come. He tied and knotted the rope callously, like a laborer on an indifferent job. The dull agony in his brain was gone. Dully he wrought his last work.

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Then he slid down. Of course, there was a moment of fierce struggle and desperate revolt, but it was the struggle of another, and didn't concern his real self. He locked his teeth stubbornly to crush the resistance of the body through which, in the twinkling of an eye, floated dreams, sweet as Elisabeth's kisses.

Then he sank into a purple rest.

Peter Strehl was dead.

Almost at the same time Elisabeth rode, with her betrothed, through one of the main alleys of the park. She knew and suspected nothing of the end of the poor little poet, who had daily bought her a little bunch of flowers out of his poor wage, and daily plucked a song for her in the meadow of his heart. In fact, she learned nothing till, at the end of forty-eight hours, a brief notice appeared in the papers. To-day she had something better to do than to think of Peter Strehl. They met carriage after carriage, and she watched carefully the looks and demeanor of the noble ladies whose ranks she was so soon to enter. But the great hats all nodded, whether in greeting or recognition of greeting. Scarcely two or three times did Elisabeth suspect that she had been consciously overlooked. "Ah," she thought in the tenseness of her mood, "just wait, you well-bred persons!"

She stored up these memories as food for her ever restless soul. She would not have been sorry had she been forced to wring her recognition from society. Life must be life to her. There they rode, these fortunate drones with their inherited titles, waiting for

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the great tourney of visits to humiliate the queen of the boards. Ah, they could wait!

She would marry, be a countess, and call herself Elisabeth Koett. She would play on and reign on as hitherto. She would not go one step out of her way to meet these people, and if they expected to show her the difference between real and acquired nobility—their expectations would prove vain.

For that would be the sensation of the season: her failure to appear. She would go to the turf, and hold her little court like a distinguished stranger, and exchange cool greetings as though nothing had happened.

She was happy. There would be a struggle, and this time with the irreconcilable hearts of women. The sparks would fly, and that would be charming.

The marriage was performed with proud simplicity. Only those were invited who were already friends, and of whom Elisabeth knew that they did not consider her elevation an impropriety. But the event was too fascinating not to attract a crowd of escutcheon-females (this was Rasmus's word) to the tiny church of St. Rupert, which was Hameler's favorite church, and had been chosen at his suggestion. In its nave whispered the ghosts of millennial history; it was dark, worm-eaten, fanatically somber, like early Christianity in a pagan land.

Hameler gave the bride away with imperturbable demeanor. Elisabeth wore a myrtle-wreath, and was proud and calm.

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Ziebern quivered with happiness. He was as much in love as a schoolboy, and his club had admired and approved his choice. Elisabeth was fashionable, racy, proud; she had style. Her salary was enormous, and, above all, she had a large private fortune. Furthermore, Rasmus had breathed forth a suspicion that she was Gundenau's daughter, and this flattering legend seemed most charming.

After the ceremony Elisabeth was most heartily saluted by many noble ladies, whom she did not know at all, and especially the young girls were much taken with the new Countess.

And yet, behind all this friendliness, Elisabeth subtly perceived a wall of well-bred reserve and pride of birth. She passed by it as carelessly as though it had been a white-thorn hedge.

She didn't go on a wedding-trip at all, and paid visits only at those houses whence her young husband brought her a friendly invitation.

In all other respects she remained the woman of whom she would gladly have been prouder than of her new title.

Into the first days of this subtle watchfulness of social combat crashed the news of Peter Strehl's inconsiderate end. He had used the rope—the "dirt-common, hideously vulgar rope!" That was Elisabeth's first sensation on hearing of the death of her mad poet-lover.

Next came, amid some remorse and a good deal of rage against the engraver fellow, a terrible fear of

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scandal. She didn't dare ask a question, least of all at a newspaper office, where some sly journalist would steal her secret from her very eyes.

She had to sit still and await, trembling, by day and night, such revelations as Strehl had probably made. But, in truth, the boy's friends knew nothing, and merely suspected that, his unusual engagement having been broken, he had made away with himself on account of disappointed greed. They were the last people who would think of avenging him. That their dead comrade had been ambitious of writing for the theater—that they knew; but that one could be unhappy because one's work had failed they couldn't believe.

For a day and two nights he swung to the tree; two days he lay in the morgue, until the police had discovered his name, and the supposed cause of his death. Then his body was taken to the medical laboratory.

During these many hours the young Countess trembled at every ring of the bell. At last she sent Rasmus to find out something concerning the remains of Strehl. Rasmus penetrated the clinic, but all along his route of investigation nothing met him except evidence of the poor boy's silence. All that Rasmus thought was that Elisabeth repented her cavalier treatment of Strehl's play. The admirable manager knew nothing. He hadn't happened to notice the paragraph concerning his recent candidate for the dramatic laurel.

Elisabeth was not easily quieted. In every edition

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of every paper she sought a mention of her name in connection with the affair. She had all the papers of Vienna brought in, to the most obscure. But, first of all, she always opened the workingman's paper.

She expected to be called a ruthless baggage, or to be admired as an inscrutable Sphinx, or cursed as a demon. In her strength and elasticity she was quite prepared to bear the reproaches and the detestation of man.

"It is a part of my vocation," she told herself defiantly, "to be terrible. I must play the passions from within. I must be able to taste of a human soul, and then to discard it like a fruit that does not please me. I must know that mood which alone made Hedda Gabler's life livable: to be sweet and terrible as love and death. O Peter Strehl, Peter Strehl! Thy dark angel spreads out its wing to bear me aloft. For I will exert a more terrible magic when it is known that I am one of those women for whose sake men die. . . ."

But her speculations were vain. The proud proletarian had held the matter worthy of no explanatory word. And this stern silence was his noblest poem. It shamed Elisabeth unspeakably. It crushed her to the earth. Not until now did she know of the greatness of this poor working-boy, who had been a fighter, a poet, a contemner of mortality. Hence she began to love him whom she had scorned and held of little account. She had found the man who could humble her; she had found him in death. She loved

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him—now—with all her soul. But all she could do was to obtain the poor, dissected body of the dead man, to hang his mound with simple flowers, and cover his memory with bitter tears.

She was a Countess. . . .

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dead
and

XVII

THREE was one other who suffered acutely under the news of Elisabeth's marriage—Wigram. Now he held her eternally lost. Some weeks before Rasmus had given him the message that pained his soul, and he had sought his old, true comforter, philosophy. In vain. For Wigram was a strong man and a full-blooded. He had never courted the pleasures of the senses; he had lived a life of renunciation; his aims had been depth, power, greatness of soul. But he had not succeeded in silencing the call of his blood. And the lonelier this wild and homely thinker grew, the more intensely tortured was he by the sight of woman's loveliness. And so hours came, heart-breakingly irresistible, in which he took a few last *gulden* which he had saved for books or for a trip into the dear distance, and bought therewith the indifferent passivity of some poor woman of the streets. . . . The struggle to renounce and a deep satiety then dwelled side by side in his heart. The love of other women he could not gain, for he was shy and lonely. He desired Elisabeth or nothing.

He meditated in vain as to why nature, in her derision, always flung him back into its flaming caldron, from which his poor, burning soul must strive again

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and again to escape. One of his most somber and melancholy sonnets spoke of such thoughts.

"Once in my boyhood, glad in alien pain
I sought to guide an ant upon its way,
And killed the little creature on that day,
Enraged that I had sought to guide—in vain.

"That evil deed comes to my mind again
And dyes with shame my cheek's habitual gray.
For the World-Spirit seeks my soul to slay
With deep allurements of a darker stain.

"Onward I strive for what my heart holds high;
The ironic moment hurls me swift aside
To batten in the foul world's casual sty.

"O dream divine forever cast from pride
Bearing a beggar's staff! Vain is my cry
Till my mortality the grave shall hide."

Thus Wigram strove and thus he cleansed and consecrated himself again and again.

But in one corner of his heart, as in a forgotten cellar, there lay the chrysalis of a hope. He never touched it, but he dared not despair of it. It was the hope that some day his fate would lead him to Elisabeth.

And now that hope, too, was at an end. The news of the actual marriage he had read in a *café* whither he often went to read the papers and consider the strange ways of the world. And when he had read that Elisabeth had sunk herself wholly into the society of those people who know no spiritual striving in

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and
their consciousness of completeness, he arose and went home. Gray, gray and heavy, was the night. The clouds crowded the sky. A storm brewed in upper air. When he reached his room it was whistling in the chimney.

He opened the window to the March night, and tried to work. But too much of the magic of growth and desire lay in this night, which came to him with its liberating wind. An hour passed, and he could bear it no longer: the night called to him. There was a dripping and flowing on a thousand eaves and trees. The last vestiges of snow melted hastily; the waters of the canals gurgled, and Wigram's pulses hammered.

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All was at rest, but he roamed feverishly about the inner city. Then midnight came, and he sought his dwelling again. But sleep was far from him, and he stepped to his window. The massive darkness of the houses was broken by a reddish shaft of light from a single window. Down in the courtyard the humidity rose in vapor between the icy walls. But up where he was the air was gentle, mild, transparent, and when the reddish clouds parted and left free a bit of sky, the stars shone so near and brilliant as though they swung immediately above the clouds.

The city dreamed. The clouds embraced and penetrated her; in the chimney whistled the wind of Spring, the wind of fertility, and Wigram felt the feminine element in the approach of Spring, the passionate thirst of the night.

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"You in those dark houses," he called out, "you have what I break my heart for, and you—sleep!"

His soul burned and raged.

At last his turbid blood forced his brain to give himself over to the agony of imagining Elisabeth's bridal night. . . . He fought for breath, he tried to repel the terrible pictures. But there was no mercy for him. They covered the ceiling and the walls of his chamber like the mischievous designs of a rococo dressing-room. He was forced to think of how the woman whom, alone on earth, he desired, was possessed by another. . . . The agony contracted his chest as with iron bands, and a cry wrung itself from him—a short, groaning, thundering cry that resounded far out into the night. The cry echoed among the roofs and walls, and Wigram, panting at his dark window, did not know that it had penetrated into many rooms, and that men arose from their beds and stared at the cloudy sky in fear and wonder.

But next morning a legend floated through the quarter, and the servant-girls discoursed, in trembling voices, of a great Night-fear, like the roc, which, storming athwart the clouds, had cried out after life, in death.

Ah, it had been the cry of the cheated spring-tide itself; it had been the impassioned cry of burgeoning nature; it had been all that the wisest and deepest mind of his day and place could contribute to the discussion of love. . . .

In this night Wigram passed through a grave

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crisis. For the meaning of that cry had also been a yearning for death. But this mad desire for the end of all things saved him. Yes, death was the reconciler. And with ineffable love he began to think of the day of the great departure. He thought of the first words which had gained him Elisabeth's attention: "Death is life's most precious gift; the yearning for it will, some day, be the most sublime of all religions." And the redeeming thought came to him: "Write a book of the Yearning after Death—a compelling, glowing, mild, and consoling praise of death! In this thought mighty peoples can lead a sacred life. The Egyptians proved it. For centuries this thought filled men with blessedness: the whole Middle Age strove for this reconciliation with death as for the palm of Paradise. And even in those days when, through enjoyment and sloth, the Church incited the detestation of men; when Luther created that caricature of a religion which forms its easy compacts with the world and the flesh to the detriment of the true kingdom—even in those days of the joy in food and drink did Dürer and Holbein turn sadly away and paint their mighty *memento mori*. O Thou great Eye that regardest us from eternity, if I could lead man—who lives in each moment—to the contemplation of Thy light, then might he again speak enduring words of imperishable things!"

And, having thought these thoughts, Cyrus Wigram stepped away from the window and closed it.

He lit his lamp and wrote and wrote. The divine

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rhythm of eternity vibrated in his veins, and in heart and brain like a surge of the sea. An unspeakable joy was his. For he would give man the gift of gifts—the key to the lost Paradise of the sublime.

It was not in the speech of the philosopher that he wrote, it was in that of the seer. He did not speak, as science speaks, to the erring and limited experience of the actual. He proclaimed, he prophesied, like a poet.

“All things stand in the midst of Eternity, nor is there any lower or higher,” thus he began. “Our little planet has produced a race that is able to recognize in itself the great, aspiring spirit of the universe. And because it feels the first, mighty breath of this spirit, it thinks that the end has been attained. But there is no end in the unending. The ladder of the spirit is lost in eternity, even as the All’s creative impulse strives from the nebula through crystal, plant, beast, man. Here upon this least of stars we are the end, but the soul of the universe must have other worlds for the spirit’s growth. For who would dare to say that in a universe where all things strive forever, one only should find its end, and that the conscious spirit of man. Do you not see that we are like a man amid mountain walls that rise above each other. We have climbed one and look back; the forward view is not ours; the cliff is too high, but it, too, shall we conquer. And you, in your blindness, say: this is the end; and the spirits in the peaks above laugh. But from mountain wall to mountain

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wall you shall not pass by taking thought: only the wings of death can bear you upward. O thou Splendor that will bear me upon the way that my heart's striving yearns after! Thou, whom a lower consciousness believes to be destruction: do thou inspire me! Yes, do thou inspire me till I am great enough to feel the woe and want of life no longer as wrongs, but as the mighty pulsations in the eternal harmony. Oh, give me grace, thou purple-winged Death, to show the trembling sons of man the great way which they have come, in order that, panting with joy, they may say to its end: O what a flight and mighty passage! Farther, O soul of mine, thou sacred strength!"

These were the first words of Wigram's noble work, and they were wrung from him after that hour in which, with elemental strength of desire, he had cried out after love—in vain. And he began his work, filled with the grace of the eternal spirit: he began his poem of the great yearning which came, one day, into the universe, and strives on through all eternity.

It was a divine poem of the great undulation that has neither beginning nor end, which, like force, is present in all spheres, leading the spirit to purer heights of vision, always more deeply suffering and full of keener joy, until blessedness and pain have become a single vision of truth.

Wigram began with the fate of a cloud. He saw it arise, strive, and die above the roofs, and he told its history with love and understanding. He described

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the somber sloth of the vapors when the sky shows a fleecy veil, neither gray nor blue, when the pale sun breaks through, and the landscape is neither sad nor smiling.

And then he described the feeling of power in that cloud-mass that waxes, and in creative ecstasy forms itself finally to the mountainous cloud of the summer sky. He spoke of the cloud's hatred of cleavage, of the terrible tension of its electric being, the outbreak of its overstrength in the despair of thunder. And in the mirror of his soul, to which had come the truth of the absolute kinship of all things, the fate of the cloud was as real and vivid as the fate of a society of men.

Next he told of the fate of a child-cloud, that arises in the blue fields of heaven, full of a gentle yearning after life, and then, without apparent purpose, dissolves like the life of a virgin.

Wigram proceeded in his history of nature, lending speech to the stone's striving after form, of the stone which, in the pressure of the middle earth becomes a crystal, beauty never to be beheld, but having its purpose in that, by virtue of it, the universe in the very core of mountains may dream its dream.

It was a happiness without limits, a blessed feeling of the brotherhood of all things, a vision of the oneness of life that came to Wigram in those hours of Spring.

He shot with poetry and wisdom and love the his

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tory of an hundred beings—the grass, the buckwheat, and the bee, the fly, the spider, and the fish, and the deer in the wood. He spoke of all their love and pain, and of their consoling and peace-giving reception into the woof of God's garment. And he spoke of beasts of prey, and of the hunt for them, and showed these phenomena, too, to be soundings upon the strings of the world-harmony.

He spoke also of the wonderful searchlight that the discovery of radium has let into the nature of things: how it has slain the axiom of the lifelessness of matter, of the finiteness of the universe's soul. And thus he showed that all advances in scientific knowledge are painful only to the striving for knowledge, but infinitely consoling to the heart that yearns for the infinite. Thus did Wigram fortify that hope in the eternal which *is* true religion.

Nine weeks after Wigram had cried out into the night for the love of woman, he wandered again through the beloved plain south of Vienna. He looked toward the far edge of the plain, where the great, blue mountains stand, and his thoughts surged mightily in him. He was dizzy with an unheard-of happiness, made up of understanding, communion with nature, and love. And once more a cry wrung itself from his soul, a cry that resounded over the plain, a cry of gladness. . . .

In these days Elisabeth had nothing with which to fill heart or brain. That combat with the ladies of the nobility for which she had nerved herself simply

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didn't take place. She was begged to enter the society from which, wit' the self-consciousness of the plebeian, she had held herself aloof. A lady belonging to the very highest aristocracy desired to engage Elisabeth's interests for a certain charity. Seeking most delicately to shield the actress's sensitiveness, and also to discover whether the new title was her weak spot, the great lady said:

"I was a little afraid to begin, for I didn't know whether Elisabeth Koett, who uses her own illustrious name, would care to be addressed as Countess."

Elisabeth, anxious to know on which of her aspects the Princess laid greater weight, replied:

"I beg your Serenity to give me any title by which your kindness would seek to honor me most."

And the great lady who desired neither to acknowledge the præminence of the name of Koett over the title, nor to hurt Elisabeth by seeming to think a mere Countess Ziebern greater than a great artist, addressed her sedulously as "dearest friend." With such delicacy Elisabeth was conquered and silenced. She was admired in her new set, precisely as in her old, in the character of an artist.

In the beginning Elisabeth infused into each of these social contacts an excessive wariness. She spoke with that deliberateness and care which Hameler had taught her. The words floated from her lips suavely as the blossoms of Spring, each bearing a hidden seed of significance. But her supposed enemies chattered on as lightly as possible, taking no

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thought. They made conversation: Elisabeth couldn't learn not to *speak*. And while she couldn't accuse her new acquaintances of the least discourtesy, and was, in truth, treated with the profoundest respect, she yet felt herself misesteemed. With all her advantages she could only do one of two things: be silent, or express true thought. A consequence was that she paid out gold and received tinsel. And this led to her discomfort. She spoke of it to her husband:

"Society really shows its small self-respect in all this made conversation. It is as if one were to propose a game at cards to a friend on the plea that one doesn't know what else to do with him!"

He reassured her.

"You're foolishly sensitive. People mean to show their friendliness to you, and that's the way they talk. The day is long, and if it's to be filled with words, you can't stop to pick and choose."

And so the class combat between a great personality and great names—the combat of which Elisabeth had dreamed—was over before it had begun. Society had, in fact, received ladies of the stage before, and their lives hadn't been any more scandalous than the lives of those to the manner born. And, in addition, Elisabeth grew more interesting day by day.

The story of Peter Strehl's end had transpired. Rasmus, the impresario, had taken care of that. And facts which, two days after the poor boy's death,

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would have caused moral indignation, were only *piquant* at the end of three weeks.

Rasmus betrayed the fact that Strehl had fallen a victim to Elisabeth's cold cruelty. According to him she had played with the poor fellow as a cat plays with a mouse, but, in view of her approaching marriage, had kept her conduct inviolably correct—a further proof of her frightful self-command. For she had loved Strehl. One had merely to ask the caretaker of the cemetery whether to this day a wreath was not always on that forgotten grave. And, since the latter fact *was* a fact, society had enough to do to admire the blending of gentle feeling with that cruelty by virtue of which this Circe slew the love in her own heart.

The verdict was: She is avid of admiration, but cold as ice. Yet, when she played, and her poor burdened, unsatisfied soul and heart uttered the yearning for some authentic passion, there was a great shaking of heads.

Ziebern himself scarcely knew what to do with her. She was so different from all the light women—good and bad—that he had known. He told her all the spicy anecdotes which his club considered specially fit for the delectation of women, and which even young girls had been known to hear with pleasure. She merely said: "I'd leave all that out. Such things are heard in the greenroom, too."

"And why should we be less amused than the folks in the greenroom?"

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"Ah yes," she said ironically, "I always forget that all men are brothers. I thought there were a few serious varieties."

At his club Ziebern complained that his wife was strait-laced to the point of boredom.

"Hm," said Hameler, "perhaps she's no friend of mere theory." This remark gave rise to endless cynical laughter. But Ziebern couldn't be gotten to betray whether Elisabeth cared for the love of the senses. Not that he was too delicate to speak of it. But the trouble was: she endured his caresses, and stared straight ahead of her, so somber of mood, so aloofly brooding, that he felt chilled. She never repulsed him. Sometimes she returned his kisses, but as if she were thinking of a dead man, or else pitying the fate of all created things. She admitted him to physical intimacy, as though he were a strange animal in whom she strove to recognize a god.

He, however, was restless and aggressive and tactless. If there was a question of gentle blood and breeding between them, both were on her side.

The difference between them was the difference of two worlds: a mighty mass of light and heat—a withering planet! She was like the ancestors of noble races: vehement, hot to love or hate, full of strong contrasts, vigorous of speech to the point of thunder, irrevocably passionate in action. His was a soul painted by God's hand in pallid tints, too well bred to flame up inconsiderately in excitement or anger: too ill-bred to curb his desires, which never rose to

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the dignity of passions. Soon after their marriage she began to treat him like a thing that can be ruled at will. When once she wanted him to see a letter, and he didn't come to her at once, she grasped the back of his chair with nervous vigor and pulled man and chair over to her. He didn't like such actions. In fact, he objected to her directness. In society Elisabeth treated men according to the significance of their speech, and the modeling of their foreheads, the vigor and the wisdom of their glance. She took people by storm with her esteem or contempt.

Ziebern, on the other hand, was anxious to know a man's social stamp before he touched his hand.

"It is actually difficult," he complained to her, "to find out nowadays whom one should pretend to esteem. One ought to have a secretary to say at the proper moment: 'That's the fellow who wrote the book about Sanscrit; yonder is the human mole who bored the great tunnel: or: there's the great church architect, and there the man who introduced adding-machines into the treasury, or the Jewish philanthropist, or the clever journalist.' . . . You can lengthen the list for yourself. Here a handshake, there a friendly bit of rot! A good deal is demanded: eh?"

"For pity's sake," she cried, "drop that hypocrisy of fineness. If only one could find a human being—just one—a passionate, growing, powerful man, he can be as good or as bad as he likes. Much I care! But one with a great task that drives him into the

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arena—a conqueror; not one of your pinchbeck emasculates! As God's my judge, they converse me to death. Everyone says the same things!"

On one of the first great gatherings in her new environment she looked about her restlessly, searchingly, angrily! Many strong men were there—in industry or trade or speculation. There were lords of iron and coal, driven by a great insatiableness. But, in eternal error, they sought only for the material and for a place in that society in which, some day, their grandchildren would loll in cloth and insignificance. She was looking for a man who did not care for the goods of the market-place, but one who throws his life away for the sake of greatness.

At last she made the acquaintance of a man who seemed to approach her ideal. He had been noticeable to her before, as the lover of the blonde Miss Kalmen, whose white shoulders had at times gleamed more brightly than Elisabeth's genius. She had thought, once or twice, that she would like to rob her rival of him. Now she discovered from Rasmus, who kept up with politics, that the young Prince was one of those fungi on the political face of central and eastern Europe—the bearer of a dynastic tradition, and heir to a momentarily depreciated crown. The family whose head the Prince's father was lived in exile at a number of hospitable courts. But there was a strong royalist party at home, the culmination of whose activity was awaited by the family to reconquer its lost throne. This was a situation that

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appealed immeasurably to Elisabeth's generous passions. He was unhappy, but full of regal thoughts; banished, but pregnant with storms; high-born, but aflame with ambition to deserve what he held his inalienable right. He must be the man she had dreamed of! The Prince, she knew, had long regarded her yearningly. She was an immense contrast to his blonde, fair, fat mistress. A change of *menu* was a natural thing for the spoiled gentleman to desire. But Elisabeth had been utterly repellent in her conduct toward him until she learned that he was the pretender to a crown, whose whole life's aim was the reconquest of his country. A man who starts a civil war and causes a whole people to lacerate each other—that was a man! . . . She was an artist, and lived in her imagination.

The Prince, by the way, didn't in the least share her prejudice in favor of greatness and strife. He sought pleasure, and considered the pleasure of being a king as a most desirable diversion. It was possible, of course, that as a ruler he would develop seriousness and greatness. A crown does, through its nobility of tradition, often inspire a sense of duty and sacredness. But at present he showed no sign of all that. He was utterly devoid of that fiery glow of ambition which so often eats into the souls of royal persons held powerless by the exigencies of succession. Few heirs apparent have ever been great rulers whose years of waiting were not corroded by that terrible passion.

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As long as Elisabeth treated him coolly, he felt merely discomfort. Like all weary and degenerate heirs, he held in especial aversion the very qualities that had raised his ancestors to greatness: Tamelessness, high ambition, restless blood, violence, and the joy of conquest, defiance, and ruthlessness. The common escutcheon of the nobility should be a heart from which streams an eternal light. Never should the consuming fire after power or greatness be extinguished.

All such qualities seemed a bit vulgar to the Prince. He didn't care for them at all. But when Elisabeth suddenly began to regard him with other eyes his expert's instinct was comforted. Now the feeling of the conqueror came to him. The prey was ready. He was rather bored by the fact that her husband's title made a measure of consideration necessary. He would have liked to go straight ahead.

But just the delicate and careful method of approach, as she saw it, endeared the Prince further to Elisabeth. She ascribed it all to the distinction of his soul. A whole summer long, while he lived in the neighborhood of the Zieberns, the Prince wooed her in an exquisite silence, while Elisabeth sought to plumb the depth of his ardor and ambition. The fact that he spoke but rarely, and then carelessly, of his crown, she attributed to the necessary self-repression and secrecy demanded by great plans. Day after day he seemed to her fuller of the dim presages of greatness, and when she returned to the great

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city, where a thousand houses are ready to mask inviolably the deeds of men, she set out—restlessly, helplessly, confusedly—upon her first adultery.

Her spiritual confusion had, indeed, been complete. For upon her first visit to the house whither the Prince had lured her, he adopted a tone which stung her to immediate protest.

“Your Highness’s experience of women must have been singularly unfortunate, since it taught you to use such a tone.”

He misunderstood her, and thought to give her pleasure by speaking lightly of Miss Kalmen.

“No, no,” she protested ironically, “I don’t like frivolous talk unless it’s witty. Couldn’t you, perhaps, change your tactics with your mistresses? In a constitutional state such flexibility would be of use!”

It made him uncomfortable to have her jest of matters that had worried him all his life. He felt that for the governing of a modern state very different views were needed than he possessed. Hence he disliked such references.

But she wanted to know how the idea of royalty looked in his soul: that was the one thing that she was determined to know. And so he promised her to reveal all his soul if she would first give him the supreme proof of her confidence. Thus he cheated her of her body.

Deeply moved by the riddle of this man’s life, which she could not explain in terms of weakness and

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smallness, she acceded to his wishes. It was still her dream to stand, an inspiring figure, behind this man, whose apparent sloth was caused solely by the influence of a nerveless society. Often, often, she said to him: "I and your people demand a glowing brand in your heart, not the heart and the behavior of a lieutenant."

"I am young," he groaned. "Give me time. Look at King Edward. In changing his name he has changed his soul, and will be one of the greatest of England's kings. The life I lead now initiates me into the weakness of men, and by such knowledge I will rule the better. This is my apprenticeship."

This answer of his chimed in with her dreams. She gave him her love, and it was to her a deep happiness to be the cleansing and strengthening fire in which a regal heart might burn itself pure against the momentous future. She would help him to be and to remain great. That's more than the Kalmen could do.

He, however, was irresistibly drawn back to his blonde Helen, who was much apter to ask after what he had had for dinner than after the woes of kingship. In fact, Elisabeth was the most uncomfortable person he had ever been intimate with. She wanted him to be a ruler, to carry the consciousness of his diadem to bed. . . . Piffle!

A few weeks after the beginning of the season, in the first days of October, he returned to the beau-

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tiful Helen Kalmen, not, however, without having first played a very "regal" trick on Elisabeth.

He took her out for a motor-spin on a day on which she was later to play one of her favorite parts. He drove her from the highway, toward the mountains, but did not go beyond easy reach of Vienna—for a motor-car. But when it was time to return, something snapped in the machinery of the car. The chauffeur worked for an hour. Elisabeth asked how long the repairs would take. "Seven hours," he answered stolidly.

She flared up in mighty rage. The Prince coolly shrugged his shoulders. She hired a carriage, and had the horses lashed to the next village. There she changed horses and raced on. The carriage shook her unendurably, but she cried out in agony that the horses crawled. She was two hours late, arriving in time to learn that Miss Kalmen, who was well-prepared, had had quite a triumph in the part.

The manager treated Elisabeth coolly, imposed a heavy fine, and chuckled at having exerted his authority over his arrogant star.

Miss Kalmen, however, though she had given the Prince her pretty hand in promise of discretion, couldn't bear her half-triumph. She broke her word and laughed into Elisabeth's face.

"Did you play for the benefit of strolling actors again? In the mountains, perhaps?"

Then Elisabeth saw through the bargain, and her breath failed at the recognition of such vulgar vil-

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lainy, where she had dreamed of Cæsarean greatness.

"Miss Kalmen," she said quietly, and held out her hand, "I'm heartily grateful to you for the light you throw on the situation. I know that you were supposed to keep silent. That you blurted it out is an honor to your temperament. You have taught me a wonderful lesson. And so I thank you again." She pressed the woman's hand, and whispered: "I won't stand in your way any longer, either in his graces or on the stage. In return I demand silence."

"You're going to the *Burgtheater*?" the woman hissed jealously.

"No," Elisabeth smiled, "I'm going a different way to greatness. But if you will keep the compact I will let you have as many parts as I can without attracting attention. Naturally it will take me some time to make my arrangements."

"Well, that sounds like a decent bargain," the woman said merrily. "So it is to be peace then?"

"Peace," said Elisabeth solemnly.

XVIII

A PLAN had arisen in her to which she gave long days of melancholy brooding. Her disillusion—rent in the great curtain of human life—pained her unspeakably. It made her think of Peter Strehl who, in the grip of a similar fate, had sought death. She had sought a king and found pasteboard.

This crisis made her suffer terribly. She spoke to no one, turned a somber aspect to her husband, and brooded and agonized: How can I cut loose from this "good society"?

Her whole being was in arms against this final disappointment that had met her.

Society! It was not the nobility *per se* that had cheated her in so dastardly a fashion; in its ranks, too, there were great lonely spirits, hearts as glowing as any proletarian's. Nor did she accuse the possessors, the men feverish for gain and rank. The heirs, as Wigram had called them—they had degraded her, the ready-made creatures of an eternally changing fashion, which, at any given point of change, holds itself to be the fine flower of the ages. The ready-made! These she hated consumingly. They had cheated her with their sluggishness, they who have the impudence to say: We are the world.

All that was left her was—revenge.

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She selected three of the fine gentlemen who take two hours mornings and evenings to dress and "get themselves up," like women: three virtuosi in the art of tying bows, three club celebrities, three faultless costumes. She invited them for a certain evening: her husband, Hameler, and the Prince. In addition, she invited as witnesses half a dozen persons who were as careful of their honor as of the cut of their coats and the shape of their shoes. Finally, she asked a few faithful friends for her possible protection—Rasmus and the silent, smiling, adoring Syrup.

It was a wild, unconventional supper. When the corks of the champagne bottles were popping their loudest, Elisabeth mounted a chair and asked for attention. She was pallid and cold as ice. She said:

"Gentlemen! George Hameler, my admirable wedding-attendant, was my lover. He deceived Count Ziebern with me before our marriage; the hopeful Prince did the same thing later. If you desire now to discuss the situation, I will disembarass you of my presence."

When she went out there was no sound in the room save the swish of her dress. The smooth faces of her guests were pale as wax. Ziebern stared about for seconds of himself and his cause. Hameler and the Prince helped him. They dared make no denial, and named their seconds. Two duels were the fruits of that merry supper.

Elisabeth rapidly gathered her more valuable personal possessions. Her fortune was safely banked.

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She didn't have to look for much before leaving the house.

In the night air she stood and stretched out her arms. Now this delusion was at an end. She had squared her accounts with society, careless of its painfully stringent laws. She had acted like a true plebeian.

Whither now? The world was open to her once more. Only it was not bright as of old: it was deep and fearful as the night. She had broken frightfully with society. She had perpetrated the unspeakable, the like of which no play had ever feigned.

How, after all, had it happened? She had wanted to excite the three men, to lash them with jealousy. She had permitted a bit of the old intimacy to creep into her treatment of Hameler; she had flirted with the still not wholly quenched desires of the Prince. Three toasts had been given in her honor, and finally the wineflown insolence of her guests had expressed itself in making a butt of Syrup, whose silent happiness stung her *blasé* gentlemen. She had thought to free Syrup from his tormentors by fixing the attention of the men on herself. She had merely meant to thank them for their toasts. Half-recklessly, half-desperately had she mounted the chair.

The electric lights had quivered radiantly over her shining room; the flowers were fragrant; all was joy and laughter, and Rasmus had cried out: "That is right, dear Countess! We want a *mænad* speech, a

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bacchic verse—an Evœ! Severin, put up your pictures and listen to Elisabeth.”

But Severin and the Prince had paid no attention to Rasmus. They had a small, intimate album, full of obscene pictures, on their knees. They had their arms about each other like brothers, and their spiritual harmony was positively angelic. But about their mouths and eyes quivered a lowering lustfulness and painted the simulacra of devils upon their youthful faces. Behind them lolled Hameler, mildly smiling at the album, too.

At that moment disgust and rage and hatred quivered madly in her, and she had pronounced the sentence of death—of social death for herself, of death by a bullet, perhaps, for the three men she hated.

At that moment she would have liked to see them throttle each other. But now, on the street, she was indifferent about that, too. All that lay behind her. The people were now her friends. Those whom she had left would be irreconcilable with all their kin.

The door of the house opened. The Prince and Hameler emerged arm in arm, the best friends possible. The young officer called in a piercing tone for his carriage. The horses approached from a side street, the two gentlemen entered without looking at Elisabeth. A footman shut the door. The two enemies of her husband rattled off.

Once more the housedown moved. A lonely man came out and followed Elisabeth with shy and gentle steps. She turned around hastily.

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"What do you want?"

"It is I, Countess," said Syrup.

"I am no longer a countess."

"As you please," he said, trembling. "Do you need a friend?"

Elisabeth looked at him in surprise.

"Ah yes," she said, "you understood, then, what those polished persons with their smooth names never could understand—you, whom they hold lightly?"

"I understood that you desired to square your accounts with them and their world."

"Yes, yes. That's what I wanted."

"And so I don't know yet whether you want to begin a new life or. . . . Dearest lady," he stammered, "I'm so frightfully anxious on your account. For that reason I took the liberty of following you."

"You need have no fear for me, dear friend. But I thank you; you are good and true. Did I carry on terribly?"

"It was colossal, magnificent. Everyone trembled. You are great even when you are terrible."

"And the three gentlemen?"

"They will shoot each other. It is frightful. Does that give you pleasure?"

"No," she said coolly, "but since that's a part of the profession of being in society, why, they must exercise it. I don't compel them."

He shuddered at the quietude of her dæmonic might. Since she had been in Vienna she had been

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mistress of his thoughts, nay, of his life. Almost involuntarily he murmured:

"Yes, you are the woman for whom one dies."

Silently she walked beside him, in whom love and fear were blending, through the night. She did not speak a single word, but crossed the *Ring* toward an hotel, in which, at least, she would be sure not to meet those whom she desired to avoid. She asked Syrup to engage rooms for her. When they were procured, she gave him her hand without further speech. It was a silent farewell.

She slept like one who has died. But the next day the agonized stirring of her thoughts began again. No revenge could heal the sickness of her deeply humiliated soul.

She was as desperate as she had been.

Rasmus the faithful came to see her. He told her that he would break entirely with Ziebern, and stand by her, if she desired it. A flickering irony illuminated his face. His mood was anything but tragic, and he spoke lightly of the previous evening:

"I'm not a bit surprised that you were dead tired of little Severin. I'll procure a respectable divorce for you. Cause: hopeless incompatibility. So your highly temperamental disclaimer of last night will have no evil consequences."

She was utterly astonished.

"No evil consequences?"

"Of course not," he said ironically. "Don't you suppose that society has its method of dealing with

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high explosives? When your friends had recovered from their first shock, the next thing we all did—even before Ziebern challenged his opponents—was to pledge our honor never to divulge the evening's events. Hameler made the proposition, and everyone took the oath. Then the conditions for the two duels were arranged. Society constituted itself a kind of court of honor after Syrup had been asked out. Well, before Hameler left with the Prince he gave his word of honor that his intimacy with you had been practically platonic, and had antedated your engagement to Ziebern. Hence these two will go in for a friendly kind of farce: light swords, easy conditions; on the first abrasion they shake hands, reconciled. And that the duel which His Serenity has graciously granted your husband will have no serious consequences—well, the Prince's political importance is guarantee enough, isn't it? He honors Severin by this appearance of giving him satisfaction, and thus heightens the latter's social importance. Finally, all concerned hope that you will observe the same discretion which will be granted you."

Elisabeth was not greatly edified by the news that, for the present, her fair fame would be saved. She said coolly:

"Another farce, then; my tragedy turned into comedy. I aim at hearts and hit—rubber. It's very instructive, and I thank you, dear Rasmus, for all your interesting bits of information, of which I care for just one: that your friendship for me is saved."

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Sadly she gave him her hand.

"Ah," he smiled joyfully, "I! That's nothing. The main thing is that, in spite of your experiment, the world is still yours—the interest of the boxes, the love of society which you need so much. And, secondly, you have left——"

"Just one thing," she said briefly.

"And that is?"

"The wagon of Thespis!"

"So that's the latest trick?"

"Yes," she said earnestly, "the vagabonds' wagon made sacred by Thespis and Molière. To-day the wagon rolls through the land considered a travesty of art, and yet it is art's sole remaining refuge. Only there can the actor escape the soilure of his calling. The wheels of the wagon touch the mud, not the actor's repertory or his art. If I have my own company, the intriguing for parts is eliminated. Each member knows his specialty. We can take thirty, or sixty, or even an hundred plays, using only such modern work as has the proven stamp of authentic genius. So there will be no contracts with authors, no management, no experiment, and no failure. The audiences are unsophisticated; the wagon can make its way to those little country towns where people tremble if only Pélleas and Mélisande go through the marionette performance. I'm rich enough; I don't need to earn money. I will pay my people well. Do you go out, Rasmus, and seek! The fieriest, the most enthusiastic of our young players will heed the call to

wander—for that urge is in their blood. They say that when Odysseus blew the trump of war, Achilles leapt from the ranks of the women among whom he hid disguised. Do you cry out: 'The wagon of Thespis is reborn!'—and the best will flock to your standard."

"But," said Rasmus, "if you appeal to the *Wanderlust* of your actors, how will art profit?"

"I will tell you," she cried: "we will play Sophocles and Molière, Shakespeare and Goethe, Ibsen and Maeterlinck. Of Hauptmann's plays we will take *The Weavers* and *Hannele*, those in which his soul cried out instead of whispering. The choice of a mighty subject betrays the artist; that of a grateful one, the mere virtuoso. The satiated audiences of the great city, who have a dozen theaters at their command, compel us to the use of crass and violent effects. I myself suffered for years from the so-called good part. Nor can I bear other aspects. Week after week I must defend myself, not against a rival's superior gifts, but her more powerful protector or lover. My art is threatened by any harlot who promises sweeter nights, by every new trick, by sophistications of dress, by white shoulders, by the newcomer's charm of freshness. To play my rivals to pieces—that's my art, and they are enthusiastic because I can do that too. But I am full of horror. I want to seek my own society; the society that is truly mine—men and women who are willing to bear hunger and thirst for art's sake. With such I would be at one;

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with such rejoice and liberate! And think, Rasmus: To gather the best spirits of a town for one or two days, to give them something on which their minds can feed for years to come, and then to go farther, farther! . . . Do you understand me?"

He was moved and wiped his brow with a plebeian red handkerchief, the banner of his liberation from society.

"Elisabeth," he said, "to-day you have come into the kingdom of your soul. Hitherto you have been an exile from it in alien worlds. I will help you with all my heart and strength. I will be your impresario, and the dust and clay of the roadside shall not touch your hem."

He went. In a few short weeks he had gathered many notable actors, above all, he had engaged Eppelin, whose delicate gifts had been unappreciated on several stages. Horst Wullenweber roared with delight at the chance: young and old capitulated to the double lure of conquering the limitless world and of playing with Elisabeth. It was to be a company that would play not for the glare and glitter of some star, but for the eternal honor of art.

But Elisabeth was neither calm nor happy yet, even when Rasmus had gone to put her new plan into execution. This wandering, which was to begin during the holidays, and save a score of restless, oppressed artists' souls—it was all but an expiatory act to her, no true liberation. Something was lacking to her! Was it her lost purity and strength?

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In her bare rented room she meditated till late into the night.

"Can I not grasp the thoughts of the great playwrights? Am I not almost their equal when I shake the souls of men? Ah, that's it—I am great only *through* them. They are the condition of me. But a leader must be a man. Oh, this old, strange, hopeless striving for him upon whom I may lean! This yearning for one who is stronger than I! Will my eyes ever see him?"

But her desperate thoughts brought her only images of divine beauty. Then a new thought came to her. In Athens stood an altar with an empty postament: To the Unknown God. Were they afraid to place the god's statue there for fear it would seem uncomely to the spoiled Athenians? And with this thought words came to her lips, half-unconsciously, and as through force of habit—words which, at one time, in her old home, she had uttered in her daily perplexities.

"I'll go and ask Wigram."

She was almost frightened at the lightness that came into her heart. She felt as if she had suddenly had news of a dear brother, lost to her for years. And while she thought that she would go to Wigram and beg him to assume the spiritual leadership of her company, all her plans seemed suddenly to become great and light. Now all would be well, and in the middle of the night she hurried through the streets, victory in her heart.

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But the way was too long. She took a cab. And every time the cabby urged his well-trained beast onward, her heart cried again: "All will be well."

She rang the doorbell, quieted the janitor's suspicion with a tip such as only folly or joy will give, and stormed up the stairs. She would sit by his bed and confess and ask and explain and weep like a wild, young sister. She knocked at the door, and her heart throbbed.

"Come in!" answered his deep, quiet voice, for he was awake and lost in thought. But the entrance of Elisabeth forced a cry from him. He had sooner expected a divinity.

"Cyrus," she cried, "Cyrus, be glad with me, for I have come back to your hopes of me!"

The wild triumphant tone convinced him at once. He sprang up, and his great voice trembled with joy.

"Elisabeth! If that is true, it is a greater happiness to both of us than any other on earth!"

She threw her hat and furs and muff from her.

"Let me look at you, dear friend and brother! Have you still your old, wild tousled head? And didn't your sorrow for me turn you gray? Ah, on what erring ways I have gone! But henceforth I belong to her to whom we both belong—to art, the sacred, the eternal!"

And like a hurt child she told him of her errors in search of wealth, of success, of self-adoration. She told him of the daily wretched squabbles at the theater. Then she breathed deeper, and her words

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came more slowly. A mountain of spiritual need had been cast off in her confession. And she told him of Hameler, and how, as his mistress, she had last thought of the sacred ardor of Wigram's creative effort. And she breathed out all her sorrow over Peter Strehl, who had had to pay with his life for her last yearning after Bohemia. She confessed the cool calculation with which she had drawn Ziebern into the compact of marriage, merely not to have to play the part of great ladies on the stage, and endure the sight of the reality in the boxes. She told him how her unconquerable desire for distinction, for spiritual fire, for greatness, had driven her into the arms of the Prince in whom she hoped to find all her ideals. And, somber and quiet of mind, she did not refrain to tell him of the bitterness of her disillusion.

Wigram was deeply moved.

"Those are lessons taught by life—wild, strange, sacred lessons! And now, Elisabeth?"

"Now?" she cried. "I have had for years the desire to change my life wholly. 'Farther, farther'—that has been the secret call of my heart. Six or seven times I tried to break my engagement in order to satisfy my fever to wander out into the goodly world. But the siren songs of the glories of this world have always lulled my soul to sleep again. Now the day of insight and the day of my turning back has come!"

She told him of her plan to have several huge touring-cars built, and of faring from town to town

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and from castle to castle, like the English actors of the sixteenth century. Thus she would seek to carry the beacon of a great art hither and thither for single priceless hours. She would go into the Slav provinces of the empire which, for the sake of their own imperfect speech, seek to form a mediocre separatist culture. And into the hearts of these foolish folk she would hurl the greatness, the sweetness, the sacredness of the Germanic ideal. Thousands and thousands of these erring, hate-filled hearts she might reconquer to that salvation which—for them—lay solely through the Paradise of German thought and speech and aims.

She was wrought up and impassioned, and Wigram regarded anxiously the twitching of her lips.

"A secret fire is eating its way into you, Elisabeth," he said tenderly, "beware lest it consume you!"

"Ah," she cried, "is that not the best fate I can hope for—to be consumed by a noble fire in the days of my youth!"

Then said Wigram as if transfigured:

"Behold, Elisabeth, the mysterious yearning of all souls has brought you whither it has brought me also—to the longing for redemption from the fables of this world."

And now he told her of his great and sacred work: the book in Praise of Death. He read her the stories of the cloud, the cricket, the bee, the pert sparrow, and the cunning fox, and he showed her that all these

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forms of being were, like herself, bound upon that Eternal Quest, and that in them, too, echoed the cry of her own heart: Farther, farther. . . . And each of these prodigal children of the universe returns at last to its redeemer, death.

In the silence of the night he read her one of his loveliest apologues concerning the death of a hermit who lay, in utter loneliness, so weakened by fever that his hand could not grasp the water jar. While his poor body throbbed in pain, hymns of the eternal might, of sublimity, of the desire of the enduring sounded in his purified soul. Thus did this most lonely of all lonely souls die amid the thunder of the forest's booming, the moaning of the trees, and in its pain and strife, yearning and peace, became one symphony.

Elisabeth's eyes gleamed.

"You are greater than I, Cyrus. I would have my art be the bearer of a cultural idea, an apostle of the German race. But if you will fare with me on my wanderings, I will seek to play into all hearts that sublime thirst for the great liberator, death."

"It is well," said Wigram; "I will fare with you."

She had found the way out at last, and her strength gave way.

"I'm tired to death," she whispered. "Have you a place where I can rest?"

Wigram spread his own bed for her as tenderly as a mother smooths the couch of a little child. H

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himself lay down on the divan. He put out the light, and Elisabeth undressed and sank down, utterly weary.

"Good-night," she said.

"Sleep well, Elisabeth."

She stretched her limbs in unwonted comfort. But before she went to sleep the truth of things came to her. There she lay at night in Cyrus Wigram's room, and they were to each other as children. And she knew that her freedom was found, for she loved him. But it was with a love which, until that day, she had not known; it was the heavenly, not the earthly love. And so, purely and happily, they went to sleep. . . .

The deer, with the hunter's lead in its heart, breaks out upon a last and mighty flight, stormy, wild, and strong, as none other in its life has been. Thus it expends its most desperate power before it dies. And, behold, that man whom the Snake of Eternity has bitten flees onward like the deer, full of fear and power, but unconscious of the hindrances of this world. He lives only to die. Once, in harsh old times, such a life could endure for a space. But in our days this recognition of eternal truth has become rare: its beauty has become terrible, and swiftly slays the impassioned heart.

So there is little to tell, after so great a thing as the return of an erring child of the world into the Eternal kingdom, save what is shadowed forth by the image of the wounded deer.

XIX

It was a mystic morning of the Spring-tide on which Elisabeth's motor-cars rolled out from Vienna.

They rolled on toward the rising sun which soared roseate and broad behind the mountains. They rolled toward that region whence the rare, slow freight trains come to Vienna, laden with wine and sugar-beets, and carrying no cultural influences and few men. They rolled into the hostile Hungarian land.

This was once German earth. And the rich vineyards from the Leitha mountains to the Neusiedler Lake, the Pressburg region to the North, the lands of Odenburg and Steinamanger to the South—all these districts were once scenes of German skill and thrift until, in the seventeenth century, they were sold to Hungary for the delusion of a crown. In the beautiful free regal cities German ability still strives, half-smothered, against the Hunnish jargon, which can never replace one of the world's great cultural tongues. And thither Elisabeth carried, for the first time in many years, the divine German word.

A time of pain and fame began for her. Those exiles from the motherland honored her as an angel bearing to them a brief immortal draught. The aged renewed their strength, the young, half tempted from their true allegiance, felt the thrill of belonging to a

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mighty and a favored folk. And Elisabeth was so strange and sweet, so magical to every heart, that all men between sixteen and sixty adored her in the German theater and, through her, the lofty speech she spoke. Thus may a single genius strive for its race.

The Magyars and the Slavs hurled venom and stones. But the rich and silent souls even among these people longed to be children of a race whose great men had created a world of thought, of happiness, of high emotion.

The papers of Vienna, of the Austrian provinces, of the German Empire, were supplied by Rasmus with accounts of Elisabeth's travels. And the whole German world followed, with love and anxiety, her apostolic mission. Her strife and her martyrdom made her more illustrious than the love of thousands had hitherto done.

But there was one who suffered from a deep melancholy beyond the wont of men. And that was Syrup, in whom glowed mightily the master-virtues of his race—Jewish yearning for the ideal and Jewish gratitude. He loved Elisabeth, oh yes, sensually and super-sensually. But what had been dearest to him were the hours of lofty emotion and thought which she had given him as an artist. He had always left the theater transfigured. Life and death, happiness and pain, had been one in him—a single harmony, a complete redemption. And now there was none who could give him that. All the theaters of Vienna seemed empty.

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He sought in the picture galleries for the works of liberating masters, and found none: he read the great poets, but Elisabeth's vibrating, stirring voice was lacking to their interpretation. He heard Mozart and Wagner and Beethoven, and for moments was happy. But when the great waves of music died into silence, he returned to reality like a slave from a fair dream-life.

Oh, how the professional actors in the theaters played! In none was divine love or scorn. Artisans of word and gesture, they had not among them one creative soul. And so Syrup suffered from a deep nostalgia for his heavenly kingdom.

For a year and more had Elisabeth been on her travels. Her life was a divine fever; she was threatened and loved; she fought and conquered. It was a life without parallel, a happiness without end, because it was so blent with sorrow. Her fortune decreased, but she heeded it not. Her life was like a torch. The more gloriously it flares up, the nearer is its end. But, ah, the light it gives!

As for Syrup, he took what little capital he had, obtained leave of absence from the bank which employed him, and followed Elisabeth. She used up her money in order to play, to conquer, to be great: he used his to live through her. As long as his means lasted, he was blessed. His honest, clever practicality suggested fears for the future; resolutely he abandoned them. He wanted to live, through Elisabeth, upon the heights of being.

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In a little town in the Carpathian mountains he met her, and reveled in joy and greatness and fought for her against the horrid rowdyism of the Magyars. Blessed as a martyr, he bore a deep scalp-wound to the hotel. He was happy beyond measure. When the railroad came to an end Elisabeth received him into her car. Soon he belonged to her company, and was teased like a private chaplain.

Thus two years and a half passed over this world of change, and still without rest the large motor-cars of the "great Elisabeth" traveled through the land. For thus the German papers called her in reverence, the Slav and Magyar press in derision and hatred, on account of her power to preach the gospel of the German word.

Often and often she heard waves of rejoicing mingle with hisses and with venom in alien tongues. And still her path lay through realms of blind hatred. Not her dignity nor her woman's weakness saved her from mistreatment and insult by word and deed. But she went her way, past enthusiasm and hate, proclaiming through the great plays of the eternally free spirits the message of liberation from the idols of the Market-place.

An intimate desire had taken hold of her to play the awakening from the agony of life. At times, of course, her company played the profound comedies of the bitter-hearted Molière, even of Aristophanes. But dearest to her were those works through which blows the breath of temporal redemption and eternal

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awakening: *Lear, Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, Mary Stuart, Faust*. . . . She was happy when she could depict death. Deeper and deeper she penetrated the secrets of the final hour of life. A thousand times did she bless the mild, rich poet of *Hannele*. And she had discovered still another poet, whose best and holiest work she carried about with loving care. And that was Peter Strehl and his forgotten *Oddrun*.

When she had left her husband, he had sent her all kinds of odds and ends that were hers. Among these she discovered, with a quivering heart, the pages of her young, dead lover's manuscript. She desired to expiate and to read the words which he, in his mistaken youth, had written. And, at the end of a few pages, her whole heart had burned.

It was a work as full of a pregnant silence as *Macbeth*. Oddrun speechlessly, but with battling soul, approaches her fate. She is almost silent through long acts unto the resonance and glory of her final cry.

And Elisabeth knew that, in Peter Strehl, she had murdered that which should have been divine and immortal.

She assumed the heritage of guilt and glory, and interpenetrated the glowing, faulty work with the might of her art. And all men trembled before the mystic reproaches of him who was dead. They shared the troubled conscience of Elisabeth. *Oddrun* became famous far and wide, and all poets

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mourned Peter Strehl, the unknown, the early dead. Adonis! Adonis!

But in Elisabeth burned still the passion for deliverance from the yoke of things: Farther . . . farther. . . . Her lovely flexible body vibrated with this passion, and became girlish again in its appealing slenderness. And those who loved her said: "She will die, like Rafael and Mozart, in her divine youth. The passion of Eternity is upon her." It was true. Her wholly spiritualized body needed but a light blow. . . .

It was a merciless Summer's day far down in the Slavonic country—whether in Esseg or Peterwardein does not matter. It was a little town by the slothful waters of the Save. The sound of German speech had not utterly died away there, and in the deadly heat of a sickly Summer Elisabeth had carried thither the consolation of the holy German tongue.

Goethe's *Faust* had been played, and her whole soul had cried out in Gretchen's last words:

"Judgment of God, to thee I am committed!"

On the benches of the hall hired for the performance the Germans of the place sat, strong, proud, glad of the sound of their mother-tongue, and of the words of the mighty poet. But when the storms of applause ceased, Elisabeth felt fevered, and drank greedily of the infected water of the district.

Days later she still dwelt in the far town beyond

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the Save. Her cars stood, blind monsters, on the common, and her actor-folk went about depressed. No one spoke of other performances.

For in her plain room lay Elisabeth, white as the wall, with dark and staring eyes.

The ceiling had been painted in crude figures. At these Elisabeth stared in the intensity of her fever. Some of the blots had been meant to represent pansies. These turned to the faces of gargoyles, which changed and shifted strangely. She saw the face of her first manager, who had been small and erect, and full of temperament. In the old, old days, a fellow-actor had made an image of himself on the wall of the greenroom: he had worked with rouge and false hair, half-painting, half relief work. And now this painted face looked down on her and assigned her the part of a waiting-maid, and her soul hurt and hurt. . . .

Another face was pale and puffed like a bun. It was that of her last manager. In a high-pitched, hoarse voice, he imposed a heavy fine on her because she had been ill too long. So she tried to jump from her bed. But Wigram and Rasmus, who watched over her, held her back. Then she grew dizzy. She heard the roaring of great motor-cars. They howled and thundered and crashed. Then one retreated and another approached. Her husband and his seconds sat in one. They were going to the duel. A third one came and, behold, it was the hangman's cart. In it Peter Strehl was rattled toward the gallows, and

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he was afraid and cried: "Huhu!" Elisabeth cried out: "Stop! He is innocent!" But the cart rolled on till lost in the distance. But from afar she could still see cart and horse in the haze of Summer that glinted in the horse's mane. Then all was gone.

Deeply moved did Wigram regard her moveless countenance. Only an occasional twitching gave evidence of the last illusions thronging her earthly habitation. Life still revenged itself with its images upon the escaping soul.

Then Elisabeth began to sing the bugle-calls from *Hamlet*.

"Oh, that this too, too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and dissolve itself into a dew . . ."

she wailed like a child. And again she sang the bugle-call. One could see how Elisabeth was trying to imitate the woeful expression on the face of Sonenthal, the great and gentle actor, who played Hamlet with something senile in his demeanor. Often she had made jest of him whom she admired. Now that, too, passed before her soul. . . .

Then came memories of Paris and Hiller. She spoke a curious French, with set teeth, like the Walloons. "Je t'aime, je t'aime, je t'aime!" With just that maddening rapidity did Sarah Bernhardt speak, with lips almost closed—a snake of passion. . . .

There was long rest and dim waiting. Then her

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voice arose again, pure, sweet, and poignant as a silver flute:

"The thane of Fife had a wife! Where is she now? "

Then she seemed to sleep. Rasmus, exhausted with long vigils, crept out. But her sensitive ear heard his step. She started up as he closed the door.

"Cyrus!"

"I am with you, Elisabeth," he said softly.

"Cyrus, have I made my will, or was it a dream . . ."

"You made it and, oh, I wish it were not so . . ."

"The will in which you and Rasmus are named as my sole heirs? "

"Yes."

"Ah, that is well, well . . ."

A pause.

"Cyrus."

"Yes."

"A curtain is rolling up—purple, blue, and gold. My new *début* is beginning? "

"Can you still jest, Elisabeth? "

She didn't answer. She hummed, monotonously and strangely, like a golden fly in the haze of Summer. Then she ceased.

"Farther . . ." she said, "farther . . ."

She turned her face away like a tired child, whom the light hurts.

Then all was still. She seemed in deep sleep, and,

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since she lay on the side of her heart, the physician had to turn her over in order to ascertain that Elisabeth Koett would never awaken to the errors of this world. . . .

Yonder, in that Slavonic town, at the end of the world, ancient custom was strong. The actress, guilty of the threefold sin of her calling, her seduction of the folk of the land, and her power of German speech, was consigned to unconsecrated ground beyond the wall of God's acre. Thus the Slav clergy decreed. Wigram and Rasmus were not the men to raise a cry concerning this circumstance. They had far too much to do in thinking about the eternal life of that restless soul that had been embodied in so beautiful a form, whom they had loved so unspeakably, and who had so divinely expiated her sins. . . .

A small event took place on the day following the funeral of the German actress. In the dawn the dead body of a man lay across the fresh mound. Earth had become useless to Syrup since the great artist of pain and passion had passed away. She had purified his soul. She died and the world was empty. . . .

At her last resting-place he had taken poison, and lay there in his ultimate faithfulness. . . .

He left a letter, begging Wigram and Rasmus to bury him at the feet of her for whom he had lived. The desire was superfluous. He would have been buried there in any case—a suicide and a Jew. . . .

Wigram and Rasmus didn't even know his given

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name. They wrote to Vienna, but received no answer. Syrup's family carried its anger beyond the grave, because of his passion and death for the sake of a Gentile woman.

Hence on the massive block of granite marking that lonely grave, there is a grotesque inscription:

Elisabeth Koett. † August 15, 1908.

Syrup. † August 17, 1908.

"Farther. . . . Farther. . . ."

To Wigram and Rasmus fell but a small inheritance. Elisabeth had used nearly all her fortune in the pursuit of her mission. Her wealth and her strength came to a simultaneous end. Yet what remained sufficed to insure to Wigram, for the rest of his earnest days, the luxury of uninterrupted ecstatic thought.

His work should be completed in these our days. It sings in irresistible strains of beauty of that dark impulse, throughout all our erring ways, after the rest which God, whose name is Eternal Yearning, has prepared for us. Upon its last pages is told the story of the life and death of that deep, sinful, wonderful woman, Elisabeth Koett, whom Eternity drove through time, whose days were but a yearning for that loftier dream whose symbol is the grave, who had lived the life of impassioned genius, and had died its death. For Elisabeth had lived for the future only to give Wigram's book a last and crowning instance of the agony of life. . . .

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And an unmatched yearning would tear the hearts of all men, could they read this irresistible book—this compelling, magically singing Praise of Death, whose secret is the secret which Elisabeth had uttered: "Farther . . . Farther. . . ."

THE END